

PlayStation®

Official Magazine - Australia

OCTOBER ISSUE 2009
100% Australian Content

PLUS

WWE RAW VS.
SMACKDOWN 2010 •
GUITAR HERO 5 • NEED
FOR SPEED SHIFT • FIFA 10
• MARVEL: ULTIMATE
ALLIANCE 2 • AND
MANY MORE!

HUGE EXCLUSIVE!

BORDERLANDS

The most innovative shooter ever?

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

UNCHARTED 2 AMONG THIEVES

Everything you need to know about the world's best PS3 game!

REVIEWED!

COLIN McRAE DIRT 2

Thrashed and smashed!

NEW SCREENS!

ASSASSIN'S CREED II

Why it's killing us softly!

FINAL VERDICT!

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

The Dark Knight sneaks
into Metal Gear turf!



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PLAYSTATION 3



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PG

Mild Themes

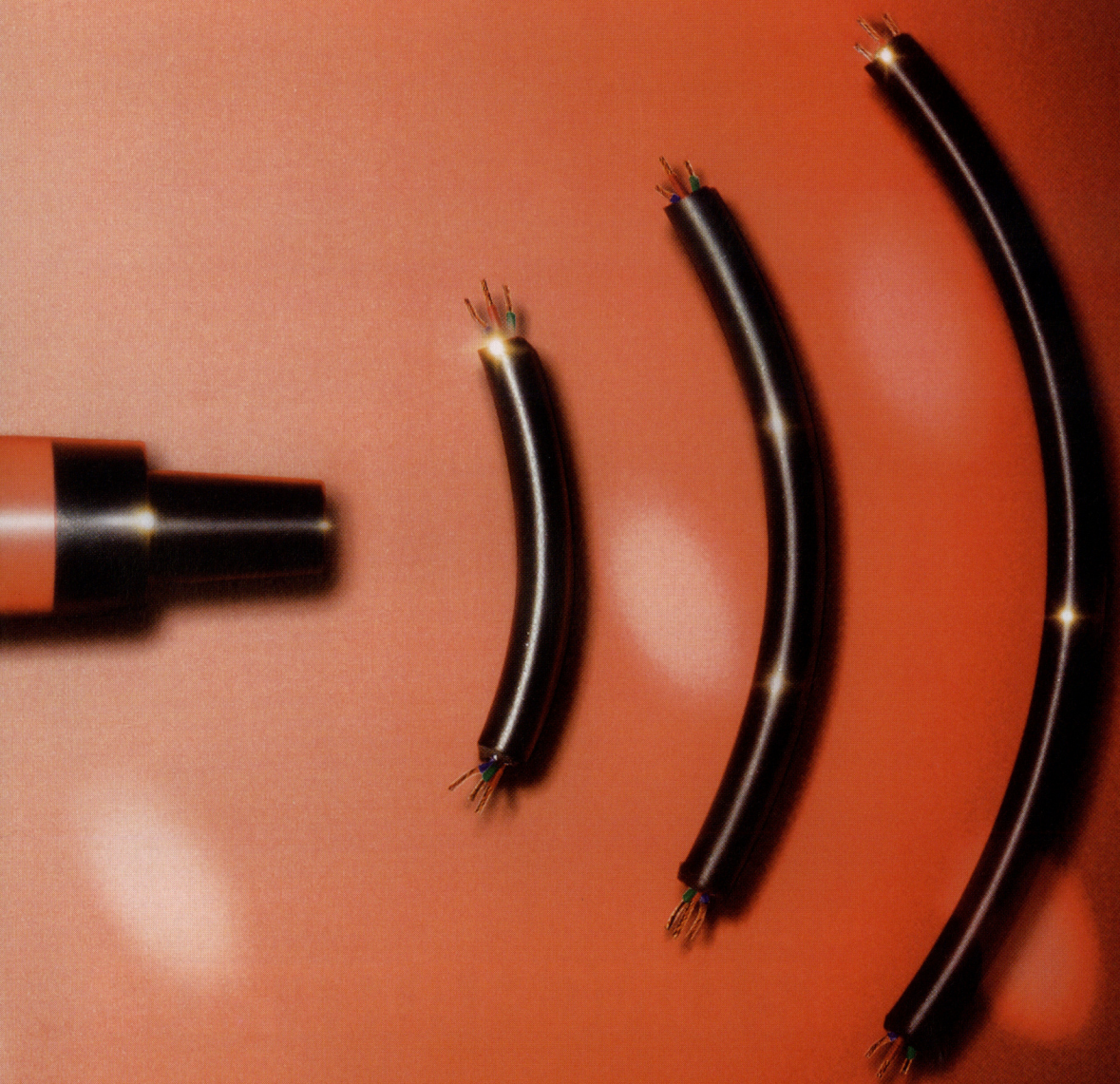


PLAYSTATION 3

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FREE to join
to play





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“You’re constantly
just waiting to see
what’s coming
around the corner”

NEIL DRUCKMANN, CO-LEAD GAME
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Pow!
Zap!
Biff!

**BATMAN:
ARKHAM
ASYLUM**
64

24 WIN!

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vs LUCY LIU

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WELCOME!

We can't remember a beginning of a year as crowded as Q1 2010 is set to be. For those who don't drive Audis to work and don't own more than one tie, Q1 is what high-powered suits call January, February and March.

Q1 2010 has become a veritable dumping ground for anything that publishers don't want to send up against *Modern Warfare 2* – largely thanks to the fact the first one has sold 14 million copies, and *this one is available with night-vision goggles*.

There are a few titles that can and will hold their own this Christmas, many of which will likely become a complimentary purchase alongside Activision's all-conquering shooter, but the result of all this shifting may mean the audience is divided even more.

The reason for this is that there's somewhere in the vicinity of a billion games coming out early next year. *BioShock 2*, *MAG*, *Singularity*, *Bayonetta*, *God of War III*, *Heavy Rain*, *Darksiders*, *Dante's Inferno*, *Aliens vs. Predator*, *Dead Rising 2*, *Lost Planet 2*, *Mafia II*, *Red Dead Redemption*, *Split/Second* and *Dark Void* are just some of titles I can think of from the top of our head. Throw *Gran Turismo 5* in there too, presumably coming out sometime between the end of this year and, say, the Apocalypse.

They might as well push Christmas back until March while they're at it. Give them extra time to polish it.

LUKE REILLY EDITOR

PSN: Capt_Flashheart **PLAYING:** IL-2 STURMOVIK: BIRDS OF PREY
WANTING: UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

OPS ON: SUPER POWERS



STEPHANIE GOH

Teleportation! Purely for the convenience of going to party capitals on the other side of the world and back. Plus, sitting on a plane is booooring.

PSN: TBA
Playing: Batman: Arkham Asylum
Wanting: Uncharted 2



PAUL TAYLOR

Always pulling the correct change or bunch of notes out of my pocket, no matter the item – carton of milk, bus ticket, Ferrari – would be extremely handy.

PSN: paulgusta
Playing: Need For Speed SHIFT
Wanting: Tekken 6



JAMES COTTEE

The power to control probability would be the only power you'd ever need. You could do anything, really. Picking up would be a breeze.

PSN: DrWho3987
Playing: Monster Hunter Freedom Unite
Wanting: Borderlands



JAMES ELLIS

The ability to fly would be nice, but how do you monetise it? Pizza delivery? Courier? No. Incidentally, heists would be far easier when you're invisible.

PSN: gtaster49
Playing: Batman: Arkham Asylum
Wanting: FIFA 10

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SHOUT OUTS: KJR :: Vinnie, happy first birthday! :: Nicole :: Mark Serrels :: Elissa @ www.edesign101.com.au :: Rebecca :: Snez :: Cam :: Zac



Gaming's latest and greatest

GO HARD. GO DEEP

Modern Warfare 2 is coming

Infinity Ward has released the first footage of *Modern Warfare 2*'s multiplayer action, and it looks typically incredible.

The video footage has revealed customisable killstreak bonuses players will be able to equip after unlocking them. It seems there'll be at least 15 unlockable killstreaks, but the debut bonus is truly spectacular - an AC-130 airstrike.

You should remember this from the original *Modern Warfare*, although it was isolated to the single-player mode. In *Modern Warfare 2* you'll be able to whip out a laptop and rain down hell from above, all over the map.

The AC-130 display is much like the one in the first *Modern Warfare* - the three bores (25mm, 40mm and 105mm) are all available - although there is a timer, indicating to us your time in the sky will likely be quite brief. You won't be invulnerable, however, as players below will be able to shoot you down. Countermeasures, like a trail of angel flares, may save your bacon.

A few smaller things we noticed included names only appearing when targeted, new challenges to organically earn you XP (stopping an enemy short of a killstreak, or sticking an enemy with Semtex, for instance, will net you a wad of bonus points) and new equipment, like the heartbeat sensor Infinity Ward debuted at E3 this year, will also be available in multiplayer.

Readers, set your wallets to open.





18 AROUND THE WORLD IN PS3
The events that shaped the games.



20 ANGRY SACKBOY
He's adorable when he's happy, but he's never happy.



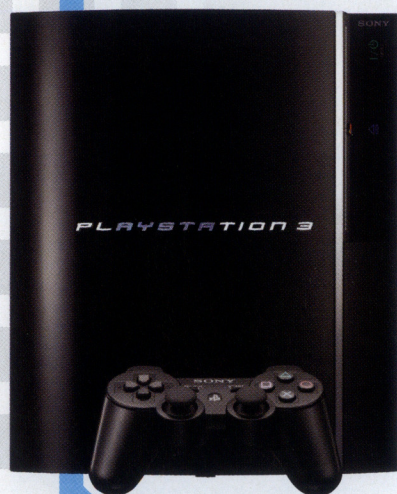
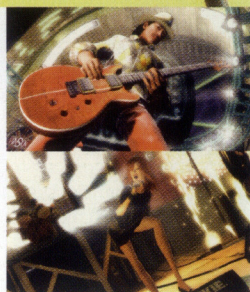
14 SCREEN-TEST
Our *Red Faction* pitch for a big screen blockbuster.



Activision has announced multiple Grammy Award winner, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, music legend and all-around dead bloke Johnny Cash will make a posthumous appearance, and his first in a videogame, in *Guitar Hero 5*. Johnny Cash's 'Ring of Fire' is one of the featured tracks on the disc, although we imagine more will follow via DLC.

Cash will join Shirley Manson from Garbage and guitarist extraordinaire Carlos Santana. We're also being led to believe Kurt Cobain will star in *GH5*, which will mean half the cameo cast is actually deceased.

Jimi Hendrix, also dead, featured in *Guitar Hero World Tour*. Activision is clearly committed to expired rockers.



PRICE CUT?

Aneccotal evidence is flooding in from retailers around the country that suggest stock levels of the 80GB PS3 have hit rock bottom, and they can't get any more – forcing retailers to sell what they have left on shelves.

This could mean a number of things, although our money is on Sony clearing the channels in preparation for a new model and a price drop. It's in Sony's best interests to move any and all existing stock before said revelation lest they be left compensating retailers.

Rumours floating out of Europe suggest a PS3 Slim is on the cards, and that it's closer than we all think. At the time of going to press, Gamescom – the European equivalent of E3 – is less than a week away. We expect an announcement regarding this will be made there, and we'll be able to confirm so next issue.

A price drop just in time for Christmas will likely have a very positive impact on console sales, and it shouldn't hurt the bottom line either. It has been reported the PS3 is now 70 per cent cheaper to produce than it was at launch.

WHAT'S HOT OR NOT

Too hot to handle? Or too cold to hold?



Need for Speed SHIFT
We're super-excited about helmet-cam

Batman: Arkham Asylum
So hot, we finished it twice.



District 9
New movie about aliens. Peter Jackson hears it.

Modern Warfare Prestige edition
Awesome or over the top?



Operation Flashpoint special ed.
Helmet + dog tag = wtf?

Ghostbusters online
Wrong map version?



iPhone voice memos
17 minutes is 42MB. Storage busting!

IN SHORT...



Although *Half-Life 2: Episode 3* is as elusive as the G Man, Valve's Gabe Newell has undertaken research in to how sign language can be used in the game, by hosting a focus group with deaf people.



The legal stoush between Activision and Double Fine Production over the release of *Brütal Legend* has been settled outside of court. Activision sued Double Fine claiming it still owned the publishing rights.



Koei "*Ninja Gaiden*" Tecmo has expressed interest in Sony's new motion controls. Kenji Matsubara, president of Koei, said, "We have to... provide the games to satisfy that [hardcore] playing style."

ROCK OFF



ROCK BAND CONTINUES TO GET OUR ROCKS OFF

Harmonix and MTV Games have announced the *Rock Band* Network, a community-based system that will give musicians and record labels the ability to author their own original recordings into gameplay files and sell their music as playable *Rock Band* tracks through the newly-created *Rock Band* Network Music Store.

"Our goal with *Rock Band* has always been to go beyond making music games and create a true music platform," said Alex Rigopulos, CEO and co-founder of Harmonix. "With the *Rock Band* Network, we've evolved the platform to its next logical step, giving players access to an incredible amount of new music by putting the professional tools we use in the hands of the artists themselves."

The *Rock Band* Network will launch as an open beta in late August 2009 in the US and provide a sophisticated toolset, with detailed documentation on how bands can begin the process of authoring songs into *Rock Band* gameplay files.

Once tracks are approved, they will be transferred to the *Rock Band* Network Store, an in-game music marketplace where players will be able to demo samples of the songs for free before they purchase. Initially the system will be native to the Xbox 360, but tracks will also be made available for PS3.

The *Rock Band* Network will likely result in an explosion of new music joining the 750+ tracks already available on the Rock Store.

Rock Band has seen quite a surge in DLC recently with tracks from Marilyn Manson, Green Day, Weezer, Kiss, Kings of Leon and Blink-182 becoming available. At the time of going to print the soundtrack for *This Is Spinal Tap* (featuring 10 Spinal Tap tracks including 'Tonight I'm Gonna Rock You Tonight' and 'Stonehenge') has just been released, and Pearl Jam's ninth studio album *Backspacer* will be made available on the Rock Store on September 20, the same day the album is released.

SCREENTEST: Your favourite games as movies

RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

It's hammer time

The Director
JJ Abrams

The Plot
In the year 2125, the world's least sweaty miner, Alec Mason, lands on Mars to see his brother Daniel. The Martian population has effectively become enslaved by the Earth Defense Force to mine resources for the mother-planet. Dan's joined Red Faction, a renegade organisation led by Hugo Davies and the spunky "Sam" Samanya. Red Faction are devoted to booting EDF off the face of Mars and freeing the population. The EDF, however, decides Dan would be better off with a bullet in his face. Alec disagrees, violently. Cue action.

The Pitch
It's a Western, but set on Mars, and with massive sledgehammers instead of pistols, and remote charges replacing dynamite.

Green Light or Development Hell?
Mars might be the red planet but it has a very green-lit sheen, and for a litany of reasons. Freedom movies are so hot right now, and in this climate of corporate fat-cats getting thrown in jail, there's a heady swell of workers steadily erupting to reclaim the wealth for themselves. Half of the dramas

caused by building sets can be avoided by recycling those from *Starship Troopers* – they're only going to get torn down anyway by a rogue hammer. Sure, the plot's well worn: a tale of revenge, heterosexual love, and taking down 'the man' but the visceral action makes it this summer's blockbuster. *Red Faction's* a bankable franchise with legs for prequels-as-sequels. Execs would be mad to pass this up.

Best Line:
Alec Mason: "You guys afraid of a hammer?"

The Cast:
Robert Downey, Jr. as the hero, Alec Mason

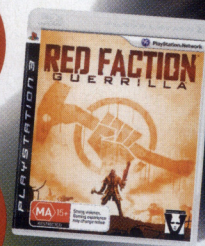
Rose Byrne as the heroine, Sam Samanya

Kirsten Bell, as the Marauder leader, Vasha

Ian McDiarmid as the quiet leader, Hugo Davies

Mickey Rourke as the gun-totin' loon, Jenkins

"You guys afraid of a hammer?"
ALEC MASON



NUMBER CRUNCHING

22

Percentage of household broadband subscribers who have a download speed of 1.5Mbps to 8Mbps, as of December 31, 2008

Source: ABS



SEPARATED AT BIRTH

NO. 8 Brazilian bombshell Max Payne – Jeff Bridges

Max and Jeff used to have hair on their heads where most men like it. Taking it to the next level though, beyond their matching alopecia, is the complimentary grizzled old-man beard with patches of grey. And, fellas, Lou Reed called: he wants the creases in his face back.



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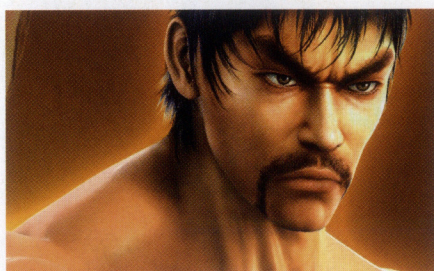
TOP 10 MOUSTACHES

Face it: moustaches are manly. It takes perseverance and patience to keep follicles under control and past the point of itchiness. For some, it's destiny. Here's a decade of dudes with righteous whiskers.



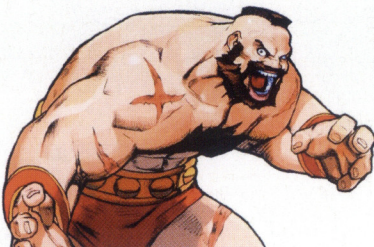
MASTER CHOP CHOP
PARAPPA THE RAPPA SERIES

While he's sporting a fu manchu like his martial arts cousin Law, Chop Chop's is more than a cliché: it's an appendage. If Chop becomes upset his otherwise smooth mo turns in to a zigzag of despair. Just don't drop the beat or Chop Chop will drop you.



MARSHALL LAW
TEKKEN 4

Law's lip fur adds striking, sharp lines to his face, and if you turn his head sideways and imagine his eyebrows and mo were punctuation marks, they'd look a lot like >|. That, friends, is the emoticon of a very ticked-off man who would be pleased to make your face a cushion for his foot.



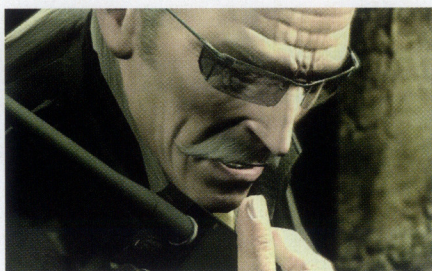
ZANGIEF
STREET FIGHTER SERIES

As Yakov Smirnoff might've said: in mother Russia, the 'tache grows you. That untamed forest thrusting out of Zangief's face is a hairy representation of an angry, bear-wrestling man. We bet he's still got bits of yesterday's breakfast buried inside it.



CAPTAIN PRICE
CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE

This walrus/handlebar-with-sideburns combo is a top effort, and it runs in the family (play *Call of Duty 2*). It's a distinguishing mark of an esteemed gent not afraid to get involved when King and Country demand his services. We're saluting right now.



REVOLVER OCELOT
METAL GEAR SOLID 4

Whether he's known as Revolver Ocelot or Liquid Ocelot is pure semantics: dude's a villain, and he's carrying a well-groomed mo' that'd make Angel Eyes from *The Good The Bad and The Ugly* proud. Hell, it's so evil (and given a bit more mass) that reserved handlebar wouldn't look out of place on Stalin.



KING OF ALL COSMOS
KATAMARI DAMACY SERIES

The alcohol-fuelled King has a cavalier attitude, and that full-bodied jaw is the perfect canvas for the swashbuckling pencil-cum-Belgian Detective. As a result it's impossible to take him seriously, yet he is the man in charge. Perfect for all belligerent royalty.



(OLD) SOLID SNAKE
METAL GEAR SOLID 4

SNAKE, when he isn't trying his luck with the ladies, is all business. You could set a watch to his haircut and his 'tache is like a ranking stripe on a uniform. Gentlemen, if you want to look like a respectable stud when you're older, look to the Snake.



SANDER COHEN
BIOSHOCK

So, your fashion sense has led you to dress up like a French waiter who moonlights as a mime. Cap off that lady-slaying, obsessive-compulsive psycho look with a fastidiously manicured pencil moustache – the Corpse Photography club won't let you in without it.



JOHN MARSTON
RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Life for an outlaw in the Wild West is inversely proportional to the time it takes him to loosen half a dozen bullets from his favourite shooting iron. He isn't going in for a job interview here, kids. Dude's got no patience for vanity. Plus, those ugly scars that disrupt the flow of hair make him look totally bad-arse.



CAPTAIN BLUE
VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

A man of power needs a tache to match: clipped, with sharp, angular points. Capt Blue's got that, and (in *Viewtiful Joe 2*) he has respect. It almost compensates for the off-putting 'outie' that's poking below his skin-tight top.

EXPLAIN YOURSELF

What's worse than Nazis? Zombie Nazis, naturally. But what's worse than zombie Nazis? Vampire Nazis! Why? Because they also want to drink your fluids, but they're smarter and faster. They're also cleaner and more charismatic, so you're more likely to let one into your house accidentally for schnapps.

THE STORY

While hunting Carpathian chamois in Romania, SS head honcho Heinrich Himmler is set upon by Dracula, who is a quite a fan of the region's unique goat-antelopes. Now a vampire, Himmler sets about turning the entire SS into immortal bloodsuckers.

HOW WILL IT PLAY?

An open-world sandbox with a full day/night cycle, *BJ the Nazi Vampire Slayer* sees everyone's favourite OSS agent spend his days cooking Nazi vampires under the hot sun and his nights thrusting stakes about.

PROBABILITY

Come on, this is a sure thing, isn't it?

EXPLAIN YOURSELF

RoboNazi is programmed to follow four prime directives: 1. Squash the public trust, 2. Persecute the innocent, 3. Uphold the war, and 4. (classified). He's part man, part machine, all Nazi.

WOLFENSTEIN: ROBONAZI RISING**THE STORY**

Tired of being thwarted in their attempts to harness the powers of occult, the SS change focus and set about building incredibly powerful Nazi cyborgs that will crush any and all enemies of the Fatherland. RoboNazi is first of these unflinching goosestepping machines.

HOW WILL IT PLAY?

Bucking its first-person shooter origins, *Wolfenstein: RoboNazi Rising* will be a pure stealth game, with the normally gung-ho BJ playing it sneaky in order to get the drop on his nanomechanical nemesis and his army of robo-drones.

PROBABILITY

You've all played games with far worse foundations than this, seriously.

WOLFENSTEIN: BJ THE NAZI VAMPIRE SLAYER**WHERE TO NOW?**

What now for *Wolfenstein*, the shooter that started it all? Well, conventional Nazis are a bit old hat these days - so how about we give the series a shot in the arm with an even more evil direction for gaming's ultimate bad guys? Read on...

EXPLAIN YOURSELF

Three words. Communist Nazi terrorists. A combination of the three biggest bogeymen of the 20th Century! Sure it makes no sense, and sure they'd wake up every morning wanting to kill themselves thanks to multiple conflicting yet completely simultaneous ideologies - but that's what makes them so dangerous!

THE STORY

After being thrashed in WWII, the surviving Nazis begin a war of terror on the US. *Invasion U.S.A.* crossed with *Red Dawn*. Like, Nazis trying to blow up school buses and firing rockets into people's homes on Christmas Eve and stuff. Evil.

HOW WILL IT PLAY?

A series of hilarious EyeToy-based minigames that see you thwarting various potential attacks by waving your arms around. We're not sure yet.

WOLFENSTEIN: NAZI DAWN**PROBABILITY**

Do we have to say communist Nazi terrorists again? Somebody get a damn chequebook, now!

EXPLAIN YOURSELF

Nazis from space. Crazy huh? They'd be just like the Borg in *Star Trek*, we imagine, but their ships wouldn't be cubes, they'd be swastikas! Wait, no - they'd have their own Death Star! Come on, they were even called stormtroopers for crying out loud! Done.

WOLFENSTEIN EPISODE 1: THE NAZI MENACE**THE STORY**

The Nazis are actually revealed to be shape-shifting totalitarian aliens from outer space bent on ruling the whole galaxy. Earth is next on their agenda.

HOW WILL IT PLAY?

Flight-based space blasting in an alien UFO that BJ has commandeered from a secret underground Nazi base deep in enemy territory. The battle for our Earth won't take place on it!

PROBABILITY

Mixing WWII with sci-fi? It's the best of both worlds!

AROUND THE WORLD IN PS3

OPS trawls high and low for what's going on around the globe in gaming



NEW YORK, USA

CITY BANS GAMING

While driving, anyway. The New York State Senate has passed a bill that bans gaming, texting, surfing the web – basically the use of any handheld electronic device. "This is a long-overdue safety measure for New York," said Senator Martin Dilan. "Texting and burgeoning [portable electronic] technologies continue to pose serious, and sometimes fatal, distractions to drivers of all ages." Fair enough.

TEXAS, USA

BIG, BIG BOSS

We want to see this in *Saints Row 3*. George Vera was charged for illegally possessing a firearm which he hid *between his rolls of fat*. Vera, who weighs roughly 225 kilograms, was initially arrested for selling counterfeit CDs and searched three times, but was only discovered to be carrying the gun once he was in the prison showers.

TUVA, SIBERIA

PUTIN ON A SHOW

Forget Solid Snake, Sam Fisher and Sev from *Killzone*. This generation's incredible hero is the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, who recently undertook a series of incredible adventures to boost his image. His escapades took him rafting down fast-flowing rivers and strutting through fields in an Indiana Jones-style hat, amongst other activities.

TOKYO, JAPAN

BREAST OF THE BEST

A caveat: we don't have the exact address of where this took place, however Koei Tecmo have launched a viral marketing campaign advertising their latest release in their ninja action game, *Ninja Gaiden 2 Sigma* by sticking a pair of fake breasts on a wall somewhere in Japan. We don't get it either. Check it out at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14x3fFSZgFg>

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

WINE NOT

Another campaign we've fallen for. Gamers around the world rose on August 9 to find dozens of wine bottles, stuffed with posters, half-buried in to the sand of iconic beaches, including Bondi Beach in Sydney, teasing *BioShock 2*. The event came after clues were posted at somethinginthesea.com. Props to those who showed up just after dawn to dig 'em up.

INTERNATIONAL CHARTS



UK

Source: ELSPA

- 1 Ashes Cricket 2009 Codemasters
- 2 Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood Ubisoft
- 3 Fight Night Round 4 EA
- 4 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10 EA
- 5 inFamous Sony
- 6 Prototype Activision
- 7 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare Activision
- 8 UFC 2009 Undisputed THQ
- 9 Red Faction: Guerrilla THQ
- 10 Ghostbusters Sony



JAPAN

Source: VGChartz

- 1 King of Fighters XII SNK Playmore
- 2 Pro Yakyuu Spirits 6 Konami
- 3 Katamari Damacy Tribute Namco Bandai
- 4 Toro to Morimori Sony
- 5 Top Spin 3 Sega
- 6 BlazBlue ArcSystem Works
- 7 Rorona no Atelier: Arland no Renkinjutsushi Gust
- 8 Shin Sangoku Musou 5 Empires Koei
- 9 The Last Guy Sony
- 10 Tom Clancy's HAWX Ubisoft



USA

Source: NPD

- 1 NCAA Football 10 EA
- 2 King of Fighters XII SNK Playmore
- 3 Fight Night Round 4 EA
- 4 Street Fighter IV Capcom
- 5 inFamous Sony
- 6 UFC 2009 Undisputed THQ
- 7 The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion Bethesda
- 8 Prototype Activision
- 9 Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood Ubisoft
- 10 Prince of Persia Ubisoft

RELEASE SCHEDULE

Coming soon to a store near you...

SEPTEMBER 2009 OCTOBER 2009

PS3 **Batman: AA**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO
 BANDAI PARTNERS

PS3 **Colin McRae: DiRT 2**
 GENRE: RACING
 DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO
 BANDAI PARTNERS

PS3 **IL-2: Sturmovik: Birds of Prey**
 GENRE: FLIGHT
 DISTRIBUTOR: AIE

PS3 **Katamari Forever**
 GENRE: PUZZLE
 DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO
 BANDAI PARTNERS

PS3 **Mini Ninjas**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO
 BANDAI PARTNERS

PS3 **Heroes Over Europe**
 GENRE: FLIGHT
 DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT

PS3 **Need For Speed SHIFT**
 GENRE: RACING
 DISTRIBUTOR: EA

PS3 **Guitar Hero 5**
 GENRE: MUSIC
 DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

PS3 **The Beatles: Rock Band**
 GENRE: MUSIC
 DISTRIBUTOR: EA

PS3 **Cross Edge**
 GENRE: RPG
 DISTRIBUTOR: AFA

PS3 **SuperCar Challenge**
 GENRE: RACING
 DISTRIBUTOR: AIE

PS3 **Marvel: Ultimate Alliance 2**
 GENRE: RPG
 DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

PS3 **OF: Dragon Rising**
 GENRE: SHOOTER
 DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO
 BANDAI PARTNERS

PS3 **DJ Hero**
 GENRE: MUSIC
 DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

PS3 **FIFA 10**
 GENRE: SPORT
 DISTRIBUTOR: EA

PS3 **Borderlands**
 GENRE: SHOOTER
 DISTRIBUTOR: 2K

PS3 **Uncharted 2: Among Thieves**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: SONY

PS3 **NBA 2K 10**
 GENRE: SPORT
 DISTRIBUTOR: 2K

PS3 **Alpha Protocol**
 GENRE: RPG
 DISTRIBUTOR: SEGA

PS3 **Brütal Legend**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: EA

NOVEMBER 2009

PS3 **Assassin's Creed II**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT

PS3 **Modern Warfare 2**
 GENRE: SHOOTER
 DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

PS3 **Dragon Age: Origins**
 GENRE: RPG
 DISTRIBUTOR: EA

PS3 **LEGO Rock Band**
 GENRE: MUSIC
 DISTRIBUTOR: WARNER
 BROTHERS INTERACTIVE

PS3 **The Saboteur**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: EA

PS3 **Ratchet & Clank: A Crack in Time**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: EA

DECEMBER 2009

PS3 **Avatar**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT

PS3 **R.U.S.E.**
 GENRE: RTS
 DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT

TBC, EARLY 2010

PS3 **Mafia II**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: 2K

PS3 **MAG**
 GENRE: SHOOTER
 DISTRIBUTOR: SONY

PS3 **Red Dead Redemption**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: ROCKSTAR

PS3 **Gran Turismo 5**
 GENRE: RACING
 DISTRIBUTOR: SONY

PS3 **Just Cause 2**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO
 BANDAI PARTNERS

PS3 **God of War III**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: SONY

PS3 **Singularity**
 GENRE: SHOOTER
 DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

PS3 **Tekken 6**
 GENRE: FIGHTING
 DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO
 BANDAI PARTNERS

PS3 **Blur**
 GENRE: RACING
 DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

PS3 **Darksiders**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: THQ

PS3 **Crysis 2**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: EA

PS3 **Heavy Rain**
 GENRE: ADVENTURE
 DISTRIBUTOR: SONY

PS3 **Dante's Inferno**
 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: EA

PS3 **Tony Hawk: Ride**
 GENRE: SPORT
 DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

PS3 **Battlefield: Bad Company 2**
 GENRE: SHOOTER
 DISTRIBUTOR: EA

PS3 **BioShock 2**
 GENRE: SHOOTER
 DISTRIBUTOR: 2K

PS3 **Final Fantasy XIII**
 GENRE: RPG
 DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT

PSP RELEASES

Gran Turismo
 OCTOBER 2009 GENRE: RACING
 DISTRIBUTOR: SONY

Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines
 NOVEMBER 2009 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT

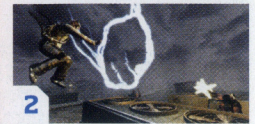
GTA: Chinatown Wars
 SEPTEMBER 2009 GENRE: ACTION
 DISTRIBUTOR: ROCKSTAR

AUSTRALIAN CHARTS

Source: GfK



1 Fight Night Round 4



2 inFamous



3 UFC 2009: Undisputed



4 COD4: MW GOTY



5 Prototype



6 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10



7 COD: World at War



8 Call of Juarez: BIB



9 Guitar Hero World Tour



10 FIFA 09

QUOTE UNQUOTE

Industry chatter, inside tips and loose lips



"It's part of human interaction that makes you more involved in the game world and your characters." **Chris Avellone**, lead creative designer, on sex in *Alpha Protocol*.



"The good news is that everyone in the known universe told us what was wrong with the first game." **Kyle Brink**, from Sega Studios San Francisco; the team working on *Iron Man 2*.



"[The quality] is not something where you wake up one morning and say [we're going to improve] and it magically happens." **Sega marketing VP Sean Ratcliffe** on *Sonic*.



"I'm sure a lot of people have thought at least once in their lives that it'd be funny if a fish had a human face and could talk." **Yoot Saito**, creator of *Seaman*. Er, sure thing.

THE WITCH HUNT

Human beings are tribal creatures; we work together, for and against the progress of our race. Cave paintings in the days of yore depict swarms of us bearded bastards pounding Mammoths for prehistoric wooly grubbage – and it took more than one bloke in the booth to successfully put a man on the moon.

History is full of examples of humanity's prowess when we gang together and get busy. The Pyramids in Egypt. The Colossus of Rhodes. In fact, having a quick gander out of my office window I can see the Sydney Harbor Bridge – a miracle of engineering, testament to man's collective will and resolve.

But there's a dark side to this group mentality – fascism, ultra-nationalism. It was a group mentality that made plenty of Germans think that the holocaust was a 'cool idea', and it was America's need for conformity and solidarity that allowed Senator McCarthy to put the fear of communism into the hearts and minds of every US citizen in the 1950s. There's nothing like a 'War on Something' to bring people together into a dangerously racist harmony of hate and fear.

These days we find both sides of humanity's need for community reflected in the modern day Wild

West that is the World Wide Web. The internet is the global village manifest – a completely lawless melting pot of ideas, an enormous cultural juicer where ideas are thrown together blindly, and subsequently smelted down into one tangible, ever flexible, endless information flow.

And again, when we work together we can do great things. Wikipedia, for example, is an incredible source of user created content. Facebook is a great way of keeping in contact with faraway friends you thought you'd never see again. The internet can be an awesome, super helpful way of navigating through our new digital world.

But in the dark recesses of the web, sticky with the grease of grotesque fanboy slobber, is the ever-repulsive video game forum. A hive of scum and villainy, a poor excuse for ventage of the most self-indulgent kind – a place where original ideas are shot down before they become fully formed, a space where idiocy is given a free, unmoderated reign.

Case in point – *Grand Theft Auto IV*. The decent and correct opinion, that *GTA IV* is an incredible achievement, has been beaten down by the collective will of an idiocracy determined to dismiss it as self-indulgent garbage. Play *Saints Row 2* instead, they'll say, it's more fun. Are these people serious?



**OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION
ANGRY SACKBOY**

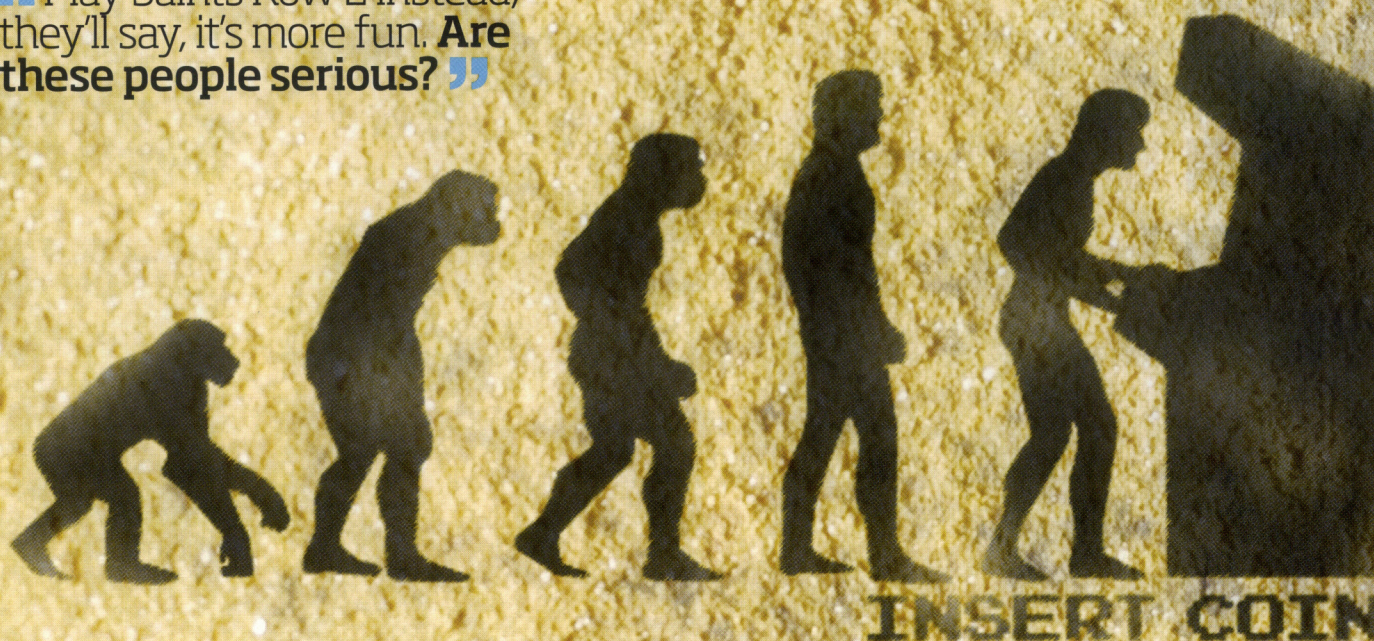
Apparently yes, and now these buffoons are at it again. Coincidentally enough, it's another Rockstar title.

When Rockstar unveiled *Max Payne 3*, complete with an overweight, bald, bearded Max, the forums baulked. Any and all curiosity with regards to Rockstar's innovative new direction for the series was instantly crushed by the sheer weight and pressure of collective vitriol. To these troglodytes, Max Payne must be shoehorned into a tiny cage and be forced to suffer the rain and darkness of the noir aesthetic for the rest of time. For many gamers, the desire to learn is a distant second to the desire to bitch.

It's all part of our need to homogenize everything. With gaming CEOs quoting Metacritic rankings as opposed to specific praise, and developers pandering more and more to the needs of simply the morons who shout loudest, we're accelerating towards the vanguard of gaming mediocrity at a startling rate. Slowly but surely, individual taste is becoming nullified, replaced with a collective numbness – a need to agree with each other and belong. Ultimately, it's the games themselves that will suffer.

Angry Sackboy is an ex-videogame journalist with low tolerance for fickle fanboys.

“Play *Saints Row 2* instead, they'll say, it's more fun. **Are these people serious?**”



INSERT COIN

IL★2 STURMOVIK

B i r d s o f P r e y

IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey is based around large-scale aerial combat over the ground-based military operations of **World War II**. Players participate in the war's most famous confrontations piloting fighters, battle planes or heavy bombers across a range of thrilling missions.

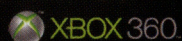
Environment and landscape visuals are taken to new heights through the utilisation of satellite photography, authentic wartime photos and historic documentation.

IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey also boasts a tangible damage effects engine where players will see real-time damage to the aircraft such as bullet holes through plane wings and trail lines in the sky during dogfights.

Available 3 September 2009
www.il2game.com



TRY IT TODAY
Demo available now
on PlayStation®Store



PLAYSTATION 3



PSP

NINTENDO DS

505 GAMES



IL2 Sturmovik: Birds Of Prey ©2009 © 1C Company. Published by 505 Games. Developed by Gaijin Entertainment. © 1C Company. Developed by Gaijin Entertainment. Published by 505 Games under license by 1C Company. Portions of this software utilize RakNet 3.0 networking software (©2008 Jenkins Software LLC). RakNet is a trademark of Jenkins Software LLC. All rights reserved.

MORPHOGENESIS OF THE CELL



OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION
CHRIS STEAD

When Sony gave birth to the PS3, it did not start life as the beast we see before us today. Back then, deep down inside its liquorish black outer coat, there was an innocent, budding young Cell Processor – little more than a fledgling glimpse of life. Like all cells it started to feel around and get a taste for its surrounds. It slowly started to develop and interact with the world around it. At first its communication with other organisms in the gaming universe,

like software, was crude and coarse, but over the years it began to evolve and take on a shape and personality to which the others responded. It began to take an active role in the ecosystem, even daring to command and rule. By the end of 2009 the morphogenesis will be complete. The PS3 is about to arrive, proper.

This was apparent to anyone that visited this year's E3. Not only was Sony's software range varied and vast, but technically impressive. From the photo-realism of *Heavy Rain*, to the spectacle of *God of War III*, through the genre-busting *MAG*, Sony's VIP booth in the upper halls of the LA Convention Center was an oasis of awesome above a hall of disappointments. Head and shoulders above them all was *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*: easily the game of the show, it looks a million bucks, and plays like a billion.

I managed to chat extensively to Naughty Dog's Richard Lemarchand, co-lead game designer on *Uncharted 2*. He spoke enthusiastically about how much the developer's understanding of the PS3 had grown between the two games. More interestingly, he also spoke about a secret developer within the Sony family called The Ice Team. This studio consists of the

very best developers at Sony and they are hard at work on base code elements that maximise the power of the Cell.

These code elements are referred to as the Edge Tools and it's a two-way street. So if The Ice Team is working hard on things like frame-rate and sound mapping for everyone, if Naughty Dog was to make a breakthrough on animations, that information was shared back down the line. This hub of activity ensures that there is a constant evolution in the quality of the PlayStation software at a base level.

Given the quality of Sony's games at E3, it is clear that these Edge Tools are really starting to make an impact. And knowing that this code is being readily shared amongst all PS3 developers should be music to your ears as it reveals that this Christmas line-up is no fluke. It marks the moment that the PS3 begins dropping software bombs that rattle the competition for the rest of this generation.

You made the right choice.

Chris Stead is a veteran games journalist with a large collection of festival hats. 1000 years ago they made Vikings that looked like Chris Stead.

“Uncharted 2: Among Thieves... it looks like a million bucks, and plays like a billion”



12 O'CLOCK HIGH!

WIN! 10 COPIES OF *IL-2 STURMOVIK: BIRDS OF PREY*

Thanks to AIE we've got 10 copies of the awesome *IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey* on PS3 to give away to 10 eagle-eyed readers (also available on PSP). We've hidden five planes from the game throughout the magazine. For a chance to win a copy of the best flight game we've ever played, send us the page numbers that you find the following WWII birds of prey on, along with the answer to following question:

If you were a fighter ace, what would name would you give your plane?

Entry details can be found on page 25.



Bf-109



I-16



PO-2



B17G Flying Fortress



Spitfire MkIX





OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION
AMY FLOWER

NO CREDIT WHERE CREDIT'S DUE

This space was going to contain a reasoned discussion about the various pros and cons of the trend towards DLC. However, after an experience this evening 'was' is now the operative word, for a flood of insanity drowned my train of thought in a flurry of appallingly mixed metaphors.

It seemed a simple idea. Download a game from the PlayStation Store with one credit card and then get the DLC for this particular game with a different credit card, a gift Mastercard with about \$6 remaining. A quick jump into account management was cool, changes made, accepted, then time to do the fun bit – shopping!

But no, Sony's stultifying concept of funding a virtual 'wallet', rather than just paying for individual purchases like in any normal economy, meant that a minimum of \$10 was required. It's certainly better than being forced to buy into some silly proprietary currency, but why we can't choose exactly how much to add is a mystery.

Okay then, fine Sony, you win this round. I'll give you access to my credit card with the limit that startles me every time a statement darkens my doorstep and buy my pissy \$4.95 worth of content (reason is, my real life car appears in a certain racing game which may or may not have the letters 'G', 'T' and 'I' in its title, and as I can't hoon around like I'm out on a track day every moment of real life, this seemed a vaguely desirable, if ultimately feeble, alternative).

In my experience, Sony has never been particularly averse to absorbing my money into its coffers. Call me a brand whore, I really don't give a fig, but they've generally given good product so I've given good cash. Raise your hand if you shelled out \$699 on day one of the first PlayStation release. Bugger, it's kind of awkward typing with a hand in the air.

Back in credit card land, however, I entered all my details – correctly. They were subsequently deemed incorrect, and I was told to check them. I did as much, doubting that I'd screwed up in the first place. Still no dice. Mrrf!

Alternate attack time – I'll try adding funds via the 'net. Same shit, different screen. Yes folks, it appears that nobody really wants my money – or perhaps they just want a few more of my brain cells to evaporate in smoky puffs of illogic first?

Granted, Sony probably needs more practice when it comes to this thanks to fact the PlayStation Network is free to begin with. It probably makes sense the big S aren't as good as taking our cash as, say, a company that asks you to pay to play. Still, the PlayStation Network's system of robbing our credit cards needs a little tweaking as far as I'm concerned. For now, I'm off for a blat in my real car. It still loves me – and has no qualms whatsoever in guzzling my money.

Amy Flower obviously relishes biting hands...



FREE to join
to play

PlayStation
Network

Hang on tight

UNCHARTED 2

AMONG THIEVES™



Coming soon. Only on **PLAYSTATION 3**



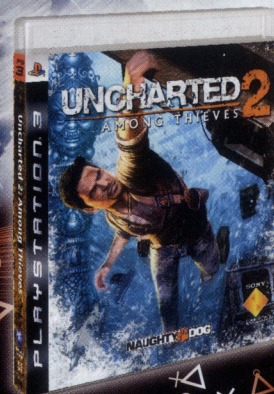
Best of Show



Best Action Game



Best PS3 Game



PLAYSTATION 3

Check the Classification

"PS3", "PLAYSTATION 3", "PS3" and "DOX" are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Uncharted 2: Among Thieves is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Copyright 2008 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Published by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Developed by Naughty Dog Inc. All rights reserved. Broadband internet service required. Users are responsible for broadband access fees. Charges apply for some content. Users under 16 require parental consent. PlayStation Network and PlayStation Store subject to terms of use and not available in all countries and languages. SPS2008/01/PSM

COMPETITIONS

WIN! WIN! WIN!

WIN!
5x
DRAGON
DYNASTY
DVD PACKS!

ENTER THE FIST

Thanks to Roadshow we've got five Dragon Dynasty DVD packs to give away. There's something for all martial arts fans in this Dragon Dynasty DVD trio: *Fist of Legend* is essential viewing for any Jet Li fan, *Robin-B-Hood* is a two-disc set, loaded with special features appealing to martial arts enthusiasts and Jackie Chan fans and the best of Asian fighting styles are put to the test in the Shaw Brothers classic, *Heroes of the East*.

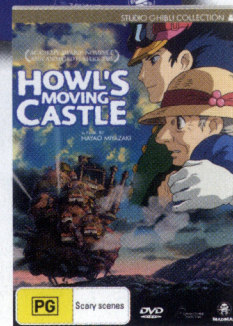
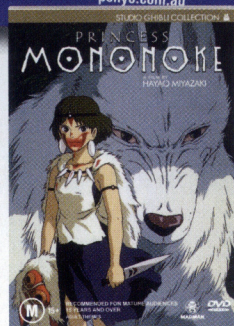
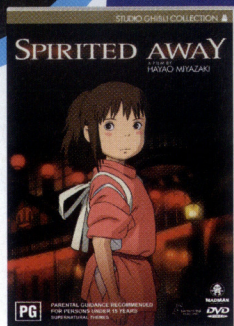
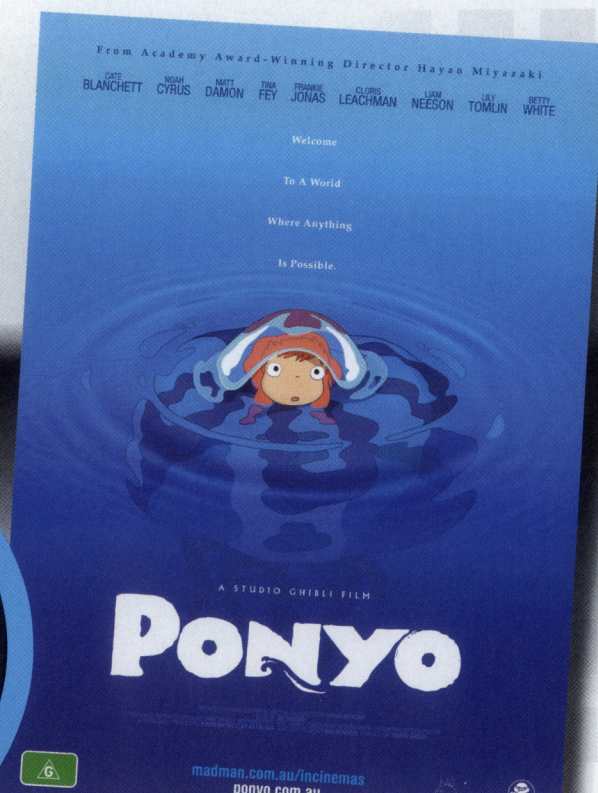
For the chance to win these DVDs pitch us, in 25 words or less, the perfect kung-fu movie. Entry details on page 25.

WIN!
5x
DOUBLE PASSES
TO SEE PONYO +
STUDIO GHIBLI
DVDS

GONE FISHING

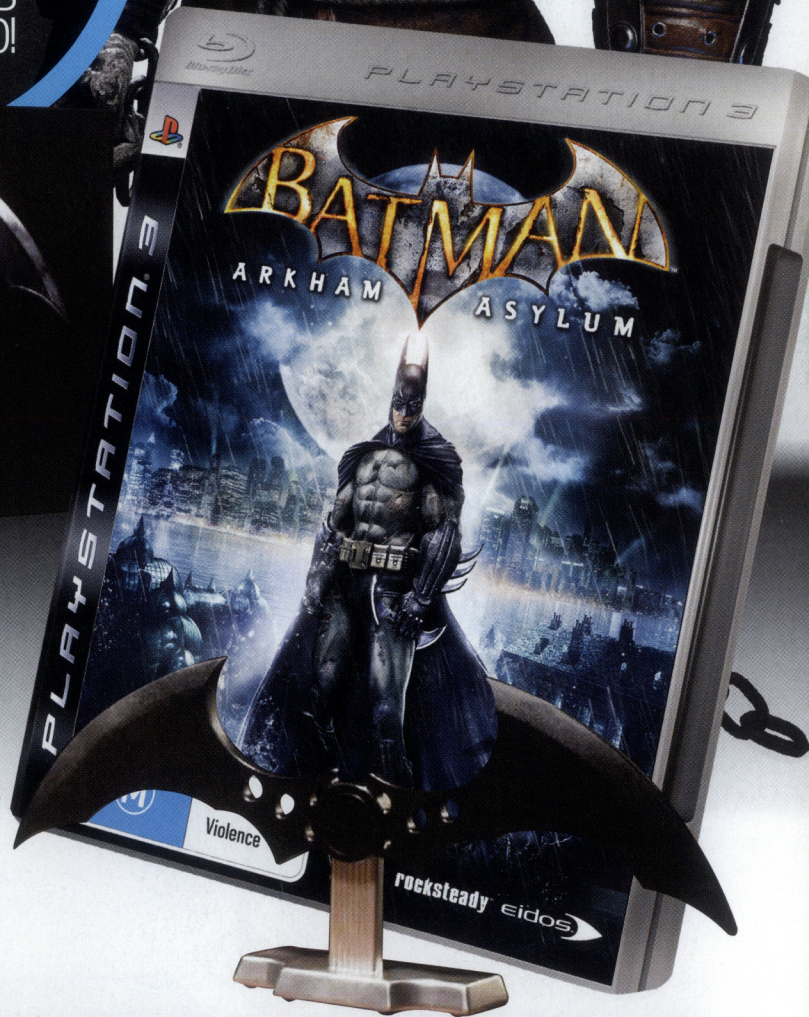
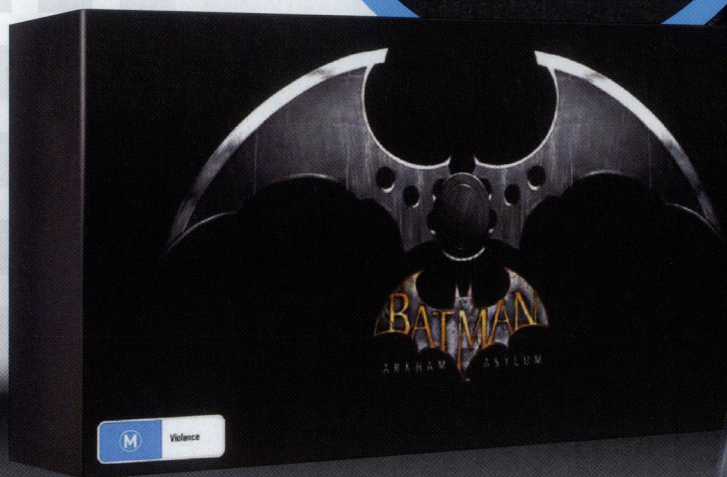
To celebrate the theatrical release of *Ponyo* by Studio Ghibli, written and directed by the legendary Hayao Miyazaki, we've got five double passes for the film thanks to Madman Entertainment. Better yet, Madman will even throw in some great Studio Ghibli DVDs including *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke*! *Ponyo*: only at the movies August 27.

For the chance to win simply tell us your favourite Studio Ghibli film and why. Enter details on page 25.





WIN!
10x
 BATMAN:
 ARKHAM ASYLUM
 COLLECTOR'S
 EDITION SETS
 WORTH \$150!



BATMAN RETURNS

Thanks to Namco Bandai Partners we've got 10 *Batman: Arkham Asylum* collector's editions to give away. Each set includes the game itself, plus a 14" Batarang with stand, Arkham Doctor's Journal, behind-the-scenes DVD, and a code for downloadable Challenge Map. Do we need to repeat the fact it comes with a Batarang? *It comes with a Batarang.*

For a chance to win one of the rad sets tell us, in 25 words or less, what you'd call your Gotham superhero (or super-villain) alter-ego and why. Entry details below.

HOW TO ENTER

To enter *Official PlayStation Magazine* competitions email your entries to ops@derwenthoward.com.au with the name of the competition **ONLY** in the subject line. Email entries are entitled to one entry (multiple entries will be deleted!). Alternatively, send clearly marked postal entries to OPS competitions PO BOX 1037, Bondi Junction 1355. Please include your name, age and address with your answer on the back of an envelope. Chance plays no part in determining winners. Competitions close 06/10/2009. Winners will be notified by mail.

Speak to us!

LETTER OF THE MONTH!

KNOW YOUR ROLE

Hello everyone at OPS,

Let me start by expressing my deepest gratitude for your great consistency with the mag. It never fails to impress me and I look forward to the new issue every month.

Well, it all started on the day I had purchased the long awaited *Street Fighter IV*. My blood was boiling from anticipation over the painful months leading up to the release and, like a lot of people, I had lined up and bought it on the 20th of February.

Naturally, after using my DualShock 3 for a while, remaining unsatisfied with the experience and being the *Street Fighter* aficionado that I am, I of course looked into buying the top quality Tournament Edition FightStick that was released along side the game, or at

the very least the Saturn style FightPad in order to enrich the experience.

After shopping around online and finding nothing I decided to duck into my local GAME and ask around to see if they have it or can tell me where I can find one. I approached the Acne-stricken, emo-fringed worker and asked if they had the MadCatz Tournament Edition FightStick in stock - the one that was released with *Street Fighter IV*. And to my disgust this guy looked at me as though I had tried to explain to him the properties of Quantum Physics.

He had no idea what the HELL I was on about!

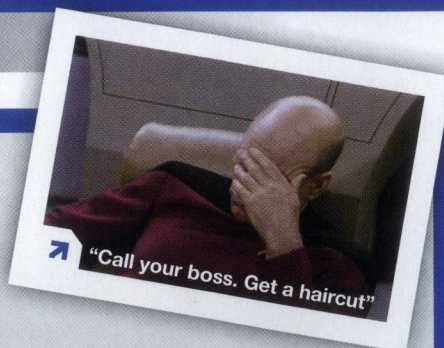
Well, I attempted to explain the concept and after a heated discussion that lasted a good 10 minutes he had the nerve to look

me in the eye and in all seriousness say to me, "Listen dude, I don't think they exist."

Well, my point is that if I, a hardcore gamer, cannot rely on the guy who works at GAME to at least know about hardware and be able to help me buy what I'm after, what hope is there for those casual gamers who do not have knowledge of games and actually NEED workers to help them buy a top of the range game?

In my opinion jobs at places like GAME and EB Games should be reserved for those who know their stuff when it comes to games. Any thoughts? Daniel Ibrahim, via email

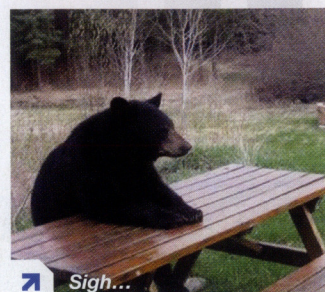
We agree. They're specialty stores, and thus need informed staff like any other specialty store. There's nothing worse than asking someone a question in a store (videogames or otherwise) and discovering said staff member has no knowledge of anything they're selling. Good luck finding one of those sticks though - they're about as rare as rocking horse shit at the moment.



SPEAK TO US

Love the mag? Hate the mag? We want your opinions and questions on OPS, on games - on anything that you feel the need to share with your fellow readers. The best letter of each issue wins the Game of the Month! Write to us on paper or on a computer at:

OPS Feedback
Derwent Howard
PO Box 1037
Bondi Junction, NSW 1355
ops@derwenthoward.com.au



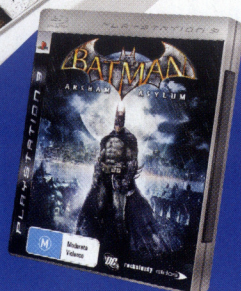
DATE HATE

Why do publishers and developers announce games so early? I hate knowing a game I want is coming out six months beforehand. Sony is the worst at it, it announced *Killzone 2* in 2005 but it didn't even come out until 2009! What's even worse is when a game company announces a game and says it's coming in four months and then four months later says it's still coming.

What do you guys think? When is it the right time to announce a game? If you ask me I think it should be a month out that a game should get announced. That gives just long enough for hype to build up but not too long that people get sick of waiting.

James, ACT

We don't like waiting either, but if publishers only announced games a month out from release we wouldn't have much to write about, would we? There wouldn't be an OPS, there wouldn't be an E3, there wouldn't be a Tokyo Game Show... nope, it wouldn't work. Publishers and developers need time to build awareness, spruik features, butter up retailers and generate pre-orders. You can't do this in four weeks! Waiting is a pain, but it's been the same with films and albums forever, so we'll all just have to suck it up.



LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS... BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

The letter of the month this issue will receive a copy of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* for their troubles - enjoy!



CORRECTION

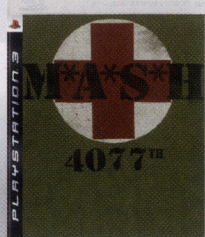
After reading your August issue I thought that I would get in contact with you people to bring your attention to a couple of points. In your article '10 Real-Life Hard Bastards That Make Kratos Look Like a Pussy' you mention about the Medal of Honor, calling it the 'Congressional' Medal of Honor. The medal is frequently, albeit incorrectly, called the 'Congressional Medal of Honor', stemming from its award by the Department of Defense "in the name of Congress". In addition, for Herbert K. Pillau you say he "closed in for some CQC." By CQC I'm guessing you mean 'Close Quarter Combat' which is not the commonly used term. CQB or 'Close Quarters Battle' is the more commonly used term.

Other than those minor things keep up the good work. Seeing the August issue in my care package from home really brightened my day. Not that the days need to be much brighter in Timor Leste. I look forward to the September issue next month.

James Bogle, via email

Thanks for steering us in the right direction James; we hope you still enjoyed the feature! Timor, huh? Nice one – glad you still keep up to date with PS3 with OPS! How about it, do we have other readers serving overseas at the moment? If you're in Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq or anywhere else drop us a line and let us know what's on your mind and what you'd like to see in OPS!

IT SHOULD BE A GAME!



M*A*S*H 4077TH
By Jeremy Scott, via email

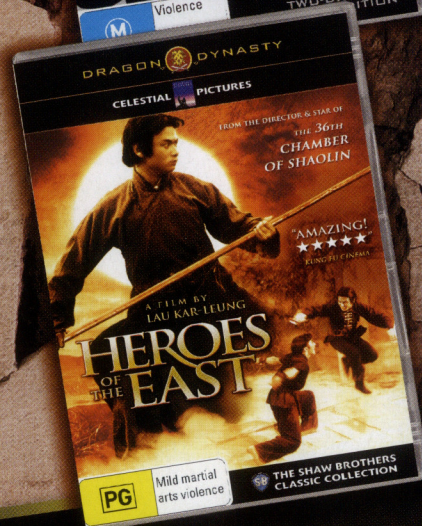
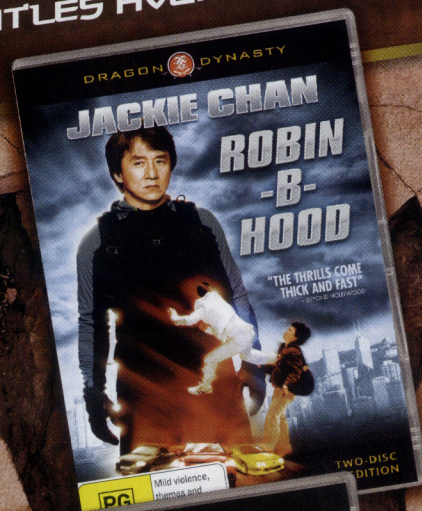
So I recently purchased the entire M*A*S*H series boxset and whilst devouring many episodes it struck me that this would translate into an awesome cult videogame!

A perfectly balanced blend of *Trauma Centre* and *Call of Duty* set in the midst of the Korean "Police Action". You play Casper "Whitey" Fergusson, wise-cracking regular army surgeon and recent transfer to M*A*S*H 4077. Everyone's favourite characters feature (with original actors providing the voices of course) as you spend the first portion of the game honing your surgical skills in camp. Suddenly the camp is overrun! You must spend the remainder of the game first person shooter style making your way to the capital city, dispatching aggressors and providing aid as the situations arise. Imagine the sound of Korean army boots tramping 20 metres from your position as you gently tilt the SIXAXIS to make a life saving incision?

DRAGON DYNASTY

ENTER THE DRAGON!

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M Recommended for mature audiences

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Speak to us!

CUTTINGS

GOOD GOD!

Is there any chance that *God of War III* could get banned in Australia?

Alexander Brown, VIC

We'd be pretty damn surprised if it was, although stranger things have happened when Australia's classification legislation is involved. Still, we wouldn't really worry about it for now.

PS3 BROKE

I'm scared that by the end of the year my wallet's going to be filled with nothing but dust and game receipts.

Khaya Mpehle, NT

Ditto.

SACKED

Angry Sackboy has nothing on me and I will tear him to tiny little Sackboy shreds...

John-Paul Murphy, via email

We'll let him know, although he fights dirty. Just a heads-up.

GET THE POINT

Hey guys, been reading the mag for a while and decided to send in a letter.

Well, I was reading the last edition you guys had and came across a valid point. We get a lot of Trophies from games but when you're done you just think, "What now?" We don't get anything from getting all those hard-earned trophies and I'm not trying to make the Xbox 360 sound good but when you get Achievements you get Gamerscore which you can use to purchase DLC for games. So I was thinking what if they made a system for the PS3 where if you get Trophies you get money?

Another topic is co-op. Co-op is great and I love sitting down playing games with friends and family but lately there hasn't been much co-op games and the ones that have it are

online. That's nice and all but some people want to use co-op games locally.

Those are just thoughts I have had lately, and I would also like to say great work with the magazine and keep it up.

Mohammad Saif Khan, via email

Who knows what could be in store? Sony recently filed a trademark for 'P.S. Thanks'.

The trademark specifically protects 'P.S. Thanks' against "entertainment services" for an "incentive rewards program geared toward quantifying, identifying and motivating top consumer base with the goal of promotion and sale of video game hardware and software." Could be interesting. We're sure we'll find out what this means soon.

We must say, however, you can't

use Xbox 360 Achievements Points to buy DLC – it's never been the case and it isn't the case now. You must buy Microsoft Points with real money to buy DLC. Microsoft Points and Achievement Points are different things. We don't know who told you otherwise but let them know they're full of a certain stinky substance.



THE PlayStation. CROSSWORD!

Official Magazine - Australia

TEST YOUR BRAIN TO WIN A GAME! How to enter: Use the letters from the coloured squares and re-arrange them to form the name of a videogame character. Send your answers to OPS@derwenthoward.com.au with OPS Crossword as the subject. Entries close October 6.

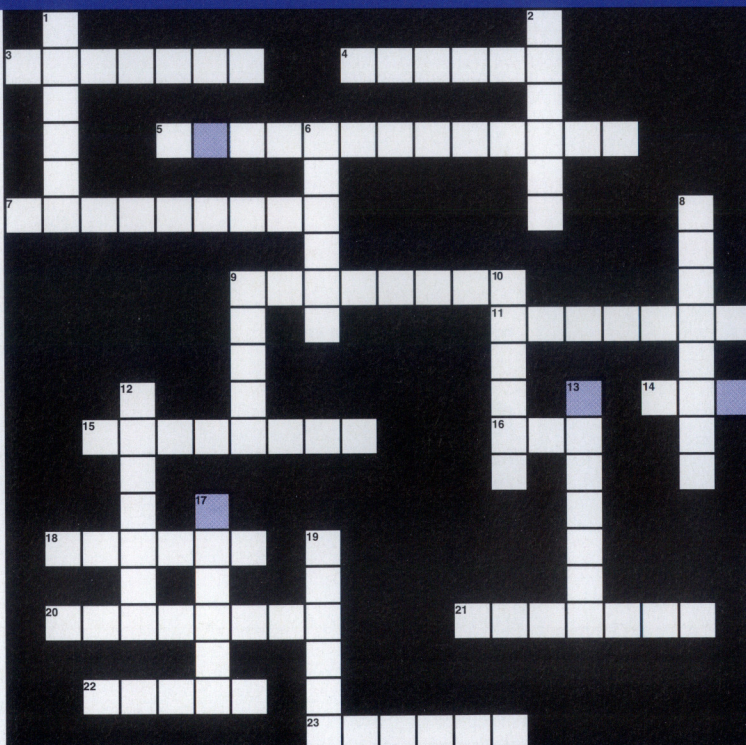
ACROSS

3. Jean-Luc Cougar was a secret agent in Koei's *Operation* ____ (7)
4. *Burn* ____ *Burn* (6)
5. The latest *SOCOM* (13)
7. One of the stages in *Dante's Inferno* (9)
9. PS3 game where you could change the landscape by shooting it (8)
11. Capcom light-gun game where you could hunt prehistoric beasts, *Dino* ____ (7)
14. Your character in the PSP game *Pursuit Force*, The ____ (3)
15. *Final Fantasy VII* spin-off, *Dirge of* ____ (8)
16. *Infection*, *Mutation* and *Outbreak* are all part of this RPG series, ____ *Hack* (3)
18. THQ's NFS challenger (6)
20. This professional played Jacques Blanc in *Onimusha 3* (4,4)
21. The female hired killer in *Max Payne* (4,3)

22. Voice of Nathan Drake and Desmond Miles, Nolan ____ (5)
23. Called *Ryu ga Gotoku* in Japan: ____ (6)

DOWN

1. Batman fighting game based on the TV series, *Rise of* ____ (3,3)
2. A city in *Assassin's Creed II* (6)
6. French-born character with no arms (6)
8. The city that *Skate* is set in, San ____ (8)
9. Heroine of *Golden Axe: Beast Rider*, Tyriss ____ (5)
10. Most powerful car in *GT2*, Suzuki ____ (6)
12. The protagonist in *Stranglehold* (7)
13. The voice of *Burnout Paradise*, DJ ____ (7)
17. *Iron Man* developer, ____ *Level* (6)
19. Ancient fighting game from Hudsonsoft, ____ *Roar* (6)



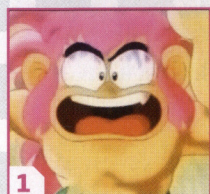
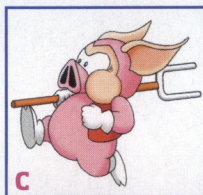
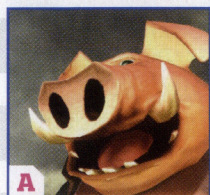
Last month's answers Across 1. SBXYJUTSU 3. HAZE 7. VENOM 8. BRRRRROTHER 13. SPACEINWADERS 14. GOLD 17. LAN 19. FELYNES 20. HOKAGE 21. ORANGEBOX 22. BLACKANDWHITE 23. PSYCHIATRIST Down 1. STERIODS 2. HOTROD 4. BASEBALLFUTURES 5. GERMAN 6. FURY 9. ZENIMAX 10. MAN 11. BROOKLYN 12. THIRDECEHELON 15. PRAGONITE 16. DAIKATANA 18. BLAGONGA

THE OPS QUIZ THING

Our imaginatively titled quiz will sort out the wheat from the chaff. Prove your worth with these brainbusters!



1. What two types of animal is a Prinny based on and what's so special about its pouch?
2. Which two real-life creatures is Dexter comprised of?
3. In which game series can you find a group of aggressive bipeds called Roger, Gon, Kuma?
4. Put the pig to the person



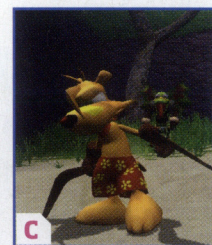
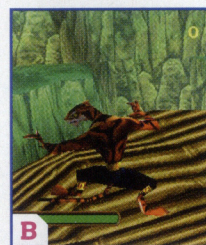
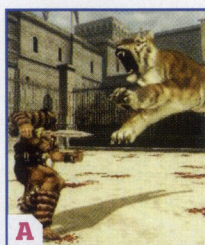
5. What animals in *Worms* can you use as weapons (not counting the worms themselves)?

ANIMAL SPECIAL

6. In what game can you kill a Hypnocatrice, Lavasioth and Nargacuga?



7. Which of these does not belong?



8. *Wipeout 2097* had a special cheat where your ship could transform into four animals. What were they?
9. What animal was used on a tech-demo disc on the very first PlayStation?
10. What do these TV shows have in common: *Angel*, *Friends* and *Family Guy*? Hint: it's about collecting fruit.
11. Which animal is related to the human, and why?



12. MATCH THE HOUNDS TO THEIR GAMES



ANSWERS: 1. They're penguins with bat wings, but they're actually hardened criminals. Their pouch is a 4th dimensional space. 2. Otter and weasel. 3. *Tekken 4*. (A) Jade, (C) Evil Kuma. (B) Bandicoot (B) with Nathan Drake (1) from *Uncharted* (Naughty Dog). 12. (A) *Dead to Rights* (B) *A Dog's Life* (C) *The Orange Box* (Half-Life 2) (D) *Fallout 3* (E) *Okami* (F) *Resident Evil*. Bee, snail, pig, shark. 9. *Trek* 10. Crash Bandicoot. 11. Sly Raccoon (A) with Cole (B) from *Infamous* (Sucker Punch), Ratchet (C) with Nathan Hale (2) from *Resistance* (Insomniac), Crash. (D) Duke Nukem. 5. Donkey, Pigeon, Sheep, Skunk, Cow, Buffalo. 6. *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite 7*. (C) *Ty the Tasmanian Tiger*. He's not actually a tiger. 8.

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THIS MONTH...

Subscribe to *Official PlayStation Magazine* and receive a copy of *Fast & Furious* on Blu-ray



FUEL FOR THOUGHT

It's been eight years since ex-con Dominic Toretto (Diesel) drove across the Mexican border, committing himself to a fugitive existence. Now, holed up in a beach shack in the Dominican Republic, and living on the run with the sole remnant of his past, Letty (Rodriguez), he tries to piece together a new life. But when the tragic death of someone he loves brings him back to LA, Dom reignites his feud with agent Brian O'Connor (Walker). As they are forced to confront a shared enemy, a sociopathic drug kingpin who is flooding the US with lethal product, Dom and Brian must give in to an uncertain new trust if they hope to out manoeuvre their enemy and avenge the tragedy that has bought them together once again.

Special Features include:

- Watch Vin Diesel take control of the viewing experience.
- Video Mash-Up – create mash-ups with your buddies!
- Virtual Car Garage – create cars with your buddies!
- Feature Commentary with Director Justin Lin

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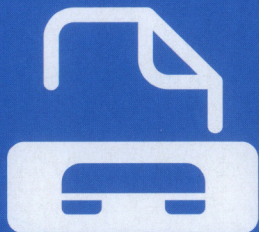
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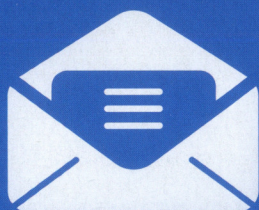
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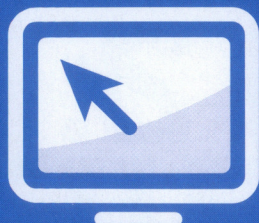
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INCOMING



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SMACKDOWN
VS. RAW 2010
Can it compete post
UFC 2009?

Exclusive looks at the very best

IT'S LIKE...

Uncharted



Awesome!



UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

Fortune and glory, kid

PS3 GENRE: ACTION | RELEASE: OCTOBER 2009 | DISTRIBUTOR: SONY | DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG



38 OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING
The hardcore shooter that will test you!



39 FIFA 10
The greatest sports game around just got better. Read why right here!



40 MINI NINJAS
Shrunken shurikens from the makers of *Hitman*!



41 MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 2
It's mate vs. mate in this civil war!



We're making a case for Nathan Drake to be the face of PlayStation. If we were charge over there at Sony HQ it'd be the second thing we'd do, marginally behind buying a fleet of Ferraris (because, presumably, we'd be rich). Sony hasn't ever really had a long-term mascot to call its own. Lara Croft and Crash Bandicoot both began appearing on other consoles years ago. Even Solid Snake has strayed – although he wasn't born on the PlayStation to begin with. There are a few that could raise their hands for the job, but they'd all be found wanting. Except Drake.

Drake is the perfect mascot. Everyone roots for the charming rogue. He's Indiana Jones, John McClane and Brad Pitt from that movie

where Angelina Jolie is trying to kill him, all rolled into one.

Best of all, he's human. A proper human, we mean. Microsoft has the Master Chief, but he's really just a tall mutant in a big green suit. He's the star of Microsoft's most bankable series, but you just can't market a masked spaceman to everyone. Same goes for Mario. He's been flying the Nintendo flag forever, but he'll never get any less dorky. They tried to make him human once. Ask Bob Hoskins how that worked out.

No, Drake has something for everyone. It's why *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* was one of those rare games that are as fun to watch as they are to play. It supported an audience

like very few single-player games do, and we imagine the sequel will be no different. We asked Neil Druckmann, co-lead game designer on *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, about this phenomenon.

"The deliberate part for us is just telling a really engaging story, having characters – really rounded characters – that people can relate to and they like, and then pacing, says Druckmann. "Pacing has been very important to us in *Uncharted* and definitely *Uncharted 2*, so just by getting all those things right you're creating a very cinematic feel, and I don't mean just camera angles and things like that – you're constantly just waiting to see what's coming around the corner. ➔

INCOMING

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves



Eep



“But I swear that’s where I left the car!”

“We’ve heard all these stories of guys playing the game and their girlfriends or wives watching it, and kinda bugging them and nudging them saying, ‘Come on, come on, when are you gonna play again? I wanna see what happens!’ – and that’s always fun for us to hear.”

Good games don’t happen by accident, and they don’t happen easy either, so what’s the single biggest challenge Naughty Dog faced making *Uncharted 2*?

“The single biggest challenge?” asks Druckmann. “Definitely just not going the easy route and, you know, making *Uncharted 1.5*. From the get-go we decided to really challenge ourselves and just push everything from the graphics engine to the way the AI behaved, giving Drake brand new moves, and on top of that, you know, throw in our competitive and cooperative online modes as well.

“So, just going throughout the project and never straying from that, you know, we’re going to push ourselves and really kind of blow the doors open with this game.”

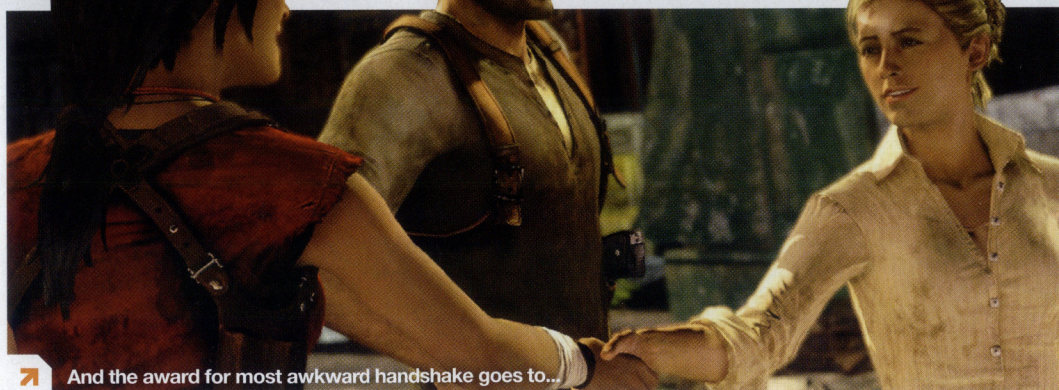
It’s this multiplayer supports that’s proving to be one of the key differences between *Uncharted* the former and Naughty Dog’s new big stick. How tough has this multiplayer aspect been to implement, seeing as though multiplayer isn’t really something ND had dabbled much in before?

“Well, we did a little bit on PlayStation 2, you know, *Jak X* was online – so we have some experience with that,” says Druckmann. “But it was a definitely a big undertaking for us.

“But we said if we were gonna do it we

were gonna do it right. We have a ton of maps, over 10 different kinds of gameplay modes just for the competitive end. We have these online cooperative maps, so yeah, it’s been a lot of work, but we hired brand new designers, background artists and programmers just to handle our multiplayer aspect, to make sure the single-player never suffered.”

Druckmann mentioned pacing earlier, and it’s something we wanted to touch on again. There’s been a lot of discourse recently about game length, particularly from younger gamers. We get quite a few letters on the topic monthly, from angry readers filling the time between all the short games they keep buying. It’s an interesting discussion. Still, does it bug developers when people gravitate towards simply arguing that games are too short,



And the award for most awkward handshake goes to...

especially since – just a few generations ago – games used to last a couple of hours if you were lucky?

“I wouldn’t say ‘bug’, but I think every game should speak for itself, says Druckmann. “We definitely want to feel players get the bang for their buck – you know, they’re gonna drop down however many Australian dollars you guys drop over there, over here it’s 60 bucks. We want them to feel satisfied with the experience, but at the same time we don’t want anyone to say, ‘Oh, the game was too long, the pacing was bad.’ We’d rather err on the fun, sort of rollercoaster side.

“Having said that, *Uncharted 2* is longer than the first game, and we’re, like I said, putting in these online modes and a ton of unlockables – we want to make sure people

“We want to make sure people just **keep coming back** to this game over and over”

NEIL DRUCKMANN

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS GOLD

Uncharted 2 scooped the pool at this year's E3, winning the most E3 awards for any game. Believe the hype, because it is that good.

1up E3 Awards:

Best Overall Game of Show E3 2009
Best PS3 Game E3 2009

G4TV E3 Awards:

Best Overall Game of Show E3 2009
Best PS3 Game E3 2009

IGN E3 Awards:

Best PS3 and Overall Graphics Technology
Best PS3 Game
Best PS3 Action Game
Best PS3 Multiplayer Experience
PS3 Award for Technical Excellence

IGN AU:

Best Game of E3

Game Critics Awards:

Best Overall Game of Show
Best Console Game
Best Action/Adventure Games



Or-chasm-ic

“We’ve definitely played a lot of multiplayer games recently and a lot of shooters,” says Druckmann. “Loved *Modern Warfare*, the first one – looking forward to the second one. *Gears 2*. *Resident Evil 5*...”

“We looked at *Killzone* a lot, and actually talked with those guys about some of their rendering techniques so that really helped us push some of the graphical stuff we’re doing in *Uncharted 2*. Then we looked at *Resistance 2* and their co-op mode and how they did some of the stuff. Those were the big games we played.”

Naughty Dog is the quiet achiever of gaming. Name a game the studio has released since the first *Crash Bandicoot* that wasn’t bloody awesome. You can’t. And yet they don’t act like other celebrity developers around the world. If you want cock wagging, for instance, you’d go to Epic. If you want a bunch of – let’s face it – self-indulgent oddness, you look towards Kojima. Why is the culture at Naughty Dog different? What is it about the studio that gives it that consistent quality?

“I think it’s the people we hire; we hire really high-calibre people, says Druckmann. “If you come here you’ll see that there’s nobody with

the title ‘Producer’ that works in-house, we just hire people that know how to self-manage themselves and are really at the top of their game, know what they’re doing and we push each other along.

“We try to keep the structure very flat so there isn’t a lot of bureaucracy. People in any department are allowed to come and criticise other departments. For example, from the design end, if I’m making a level that’s not fun, I’m gonna hear about it from the animators, the programmers, from everybody. Likewise, if I see, let’s say, an animation I don’t think looks good I’m gonna go and bug those people as well. So we really try to create a culture where we have open criticism and that really lets us push the boundaries of what we can do.”

We mention to him that ND has recently announced that *Uncharted 2* doesn’t need a mandatory install, but the game looks compromise-free. Yet there are still developers out there who still moan that, “We can’t do this”, “We can’t do that, it’s too hard” – what does he have to say about that?

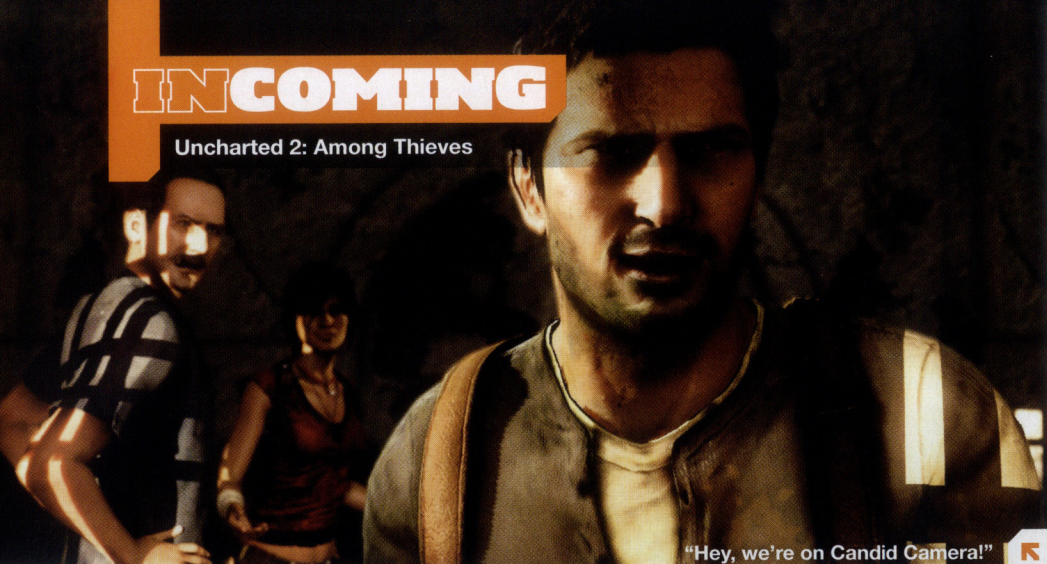
“Well, I mean, we have some of the best programmers in the industry, so obviously not →

just keep coming back to this game over and over, and just creating that kind of atmosphere and storytelling and big cinematic moments so people want to play through even the single-player more than once.”

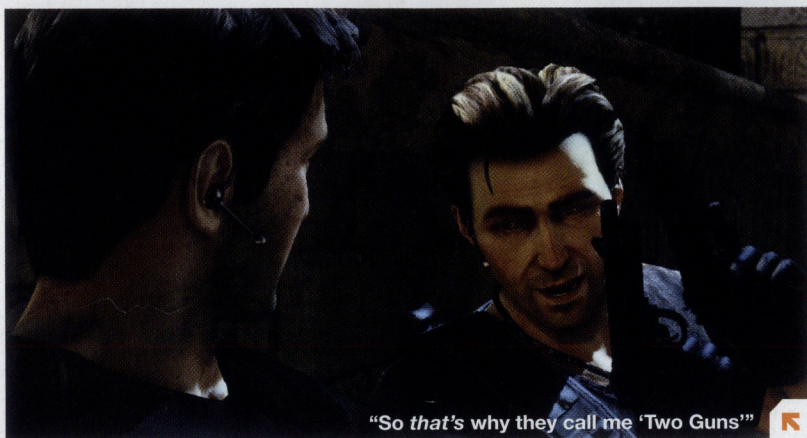
So have there been any other titles that have come out since *Uncharted* was released that have resonated with the guys over at Naughty Dog? Has there been anything in another game they’ve looked at and said, “Yeah, let’s do something like that!” or similar?

INCOMING

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves



"Hey, we're on Candid Camera!"

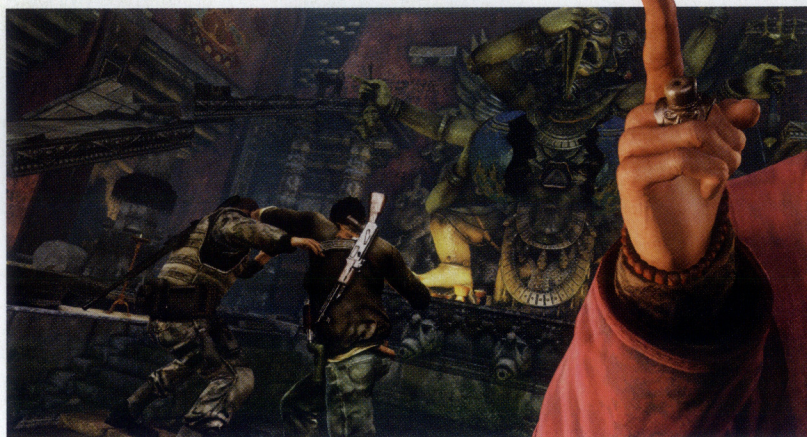


"So that's why they call me 'Two Guns'"



“It’s cool to see that we had this plan... and **now it’s paying off**”

NEIL DRUCKMANN



everyone can create the kind of engine we do,” says Druckmann. “Also, in-house here, I don’t know if you’ve heard but we have The Ice Team, which is a bunch of programmers from Naughty Dog that actually make tools for other developers to help them come to grasp with the PS3.

“The one thing that bugs me personally is when people say, ‘Oh, it’s not possible on the PS3.’ I think we’re definitely coming out there and showing what the PS3 can do, and even where we can go from here.”

The topic turns to some of *Uncharted 2*’s new faces. This new girl, Chloe, we hear she’s Australian, we say. Crash Bandicoot, also Australian. Is this a coincidence?

“Oh, don’t forget Harry Flynn, Drake’s partner at the beginning of the game, also Australian,” adds Druckmann.

“What is it with all these shady people coming out of Australia?” he continues. “Yeah,

I don’t know, it’s kind of these cool characters, and that’s just where they happen to come from.

“Actually, some of the characters change depending on who we cast – for example, Chloe and Flynn, we didn’t know they were going to be Australian. Well, we kinda guessed it, but if we’d have cast somebody from a different background we would have changed their character.”

Actually, speaking of voice actors, do you the guys at ND get as surprised as us every time they hear Nolan North in another game? That guy’s everywhere!

“He’s pretty good,” says Druckmann.

“No, not surprised, he usually gives us a good heads-up before we hear him in some game, or some movie – it was definitely cool to hear him in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. He’s just good, so he’s in demand, so we don’t have a problem with that.”

So, can he tell us something about *Uncharted 2* that nobody else knows? Yes, he can.

“Let’s see,” says Druckmann. “I don’t think we’ve announced this but if you played *Uncharted* and you got some medals, we’re gonna give you some cash towards unlockables in *Uncharted 2*, so don’t delete your save game.”

Okay. But he’s not done.

“Also we’re gonna have this machinima mode where you can just kinda drop into this jungle gym and you can spawn any one of our characters, do all these cool acts, or move around, and actually film your character in front of an in-game green screen, so you can superimpose in whatever you want,” he says.

“Also, when you talk over the microphone you’ll see their lips moving, so it’s really going to give people the ability to create their own

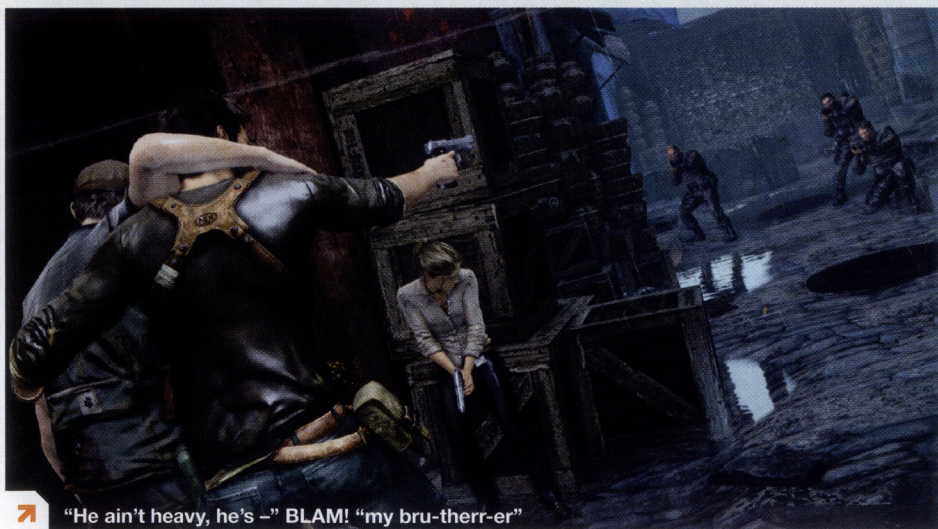


movies with our characters."

It's quite the titbit. If this works, and we've really got no reason to assume it won't, expect to see all manner of user-created short flicks using *Uncharted 2*'s purpose built movie-maker. This is the kind of stuff that pierces deep. Get this right and the internet will make *Uncharted 2* immortal.

So what about Druckmann himself? We ask what his favourite part of *Uncharted 2* is. "My favourite part?" he asks. "I can't really talk about it because I don't want to spoil it, but I will say there's this bit with Tenzin, this guy that kind of guides you through the ice cave.

"There's this whole section from when you get to this Nepalese village going to this ice cave, and then when you go forward there's this really subtle kind of relationship we're trying to build between Drake and Tenzin. Tenzin doesn't speak any English, so the guys both



➤ "He ain't heavy, he's –" BLAM! "my bru-therr-er"

have to improvise, and through gameplay we really tried to build this relationship between these two characters. Only recently with the level design, with the voice acting, with the graphics, with the music, everything is coming together and it's starting to pay off. We've had these focus tests where people say, 'Yeah that was my favourite character, I really related to him'. It's cool to see that we had this plan and we stuck along with it and now it's paying off."

Speaking of paying off, we've got a pre-order to sink more cash into. 📺 **Luke Reilly**

WE SAY

- ⬆️ Unmatched production values
- ⬆️ Looks even better
- ⬇️ We think Sully might cop it

OPS IS...
observing approvingly



INCOMING

Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising

"This kaleidoscope's just awful"

EGO IS NOT A DIRTY WORD

To get technical for a moment, the game engine running *Dragon Rising* is called EGO; the same one that powers *DiRT* and *GRID*. It's an odd fit that Codies are trying to make by shoehorning a shooter into a racing game's, er, engine. We're sure they spent a lot of money on it and it works beautifully in *DiRT*, though we're less convinced here.

PS3 GENRE: SHOOTER | RELEASE: OCTOBER | DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS | DEVELOPER: BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING

Crouching marine, hidden bullet

"Picnic location identified!"

"That'd better be brown camo..."

It's like a fancy SilkWorm

IT'S LIKE...

SOCOM



Full Spectrum Warrior



OPS should never become military leaders. That's the lesson this realistic shooter taught us on our third restart when we tried to blow up a radar array. If it wasn't the enemy with the noisy but alarmingly accurate machine gun it was our own impatience to storm in to battle, or accidental philosophy of 'leave every man behind', whether they were mildly wounded or fatally clipped. It's our own fault. We should've realised what the tempo of the game would be when we discovered there are three distinct ways to crouch and move through the fields. *Battlefield: Bad Company*, this ain't.

Everything you do must have a plan: run and gun isn't an option unless you want to be forced back to the nearest checkpoint. Your team rely

on you for guidance in battle, though they still have the sense to shoot back when under fire. The instructions you do give are reminiscent of *SOCOM*'s as your avatar barks back to the squad. These orders are quite detailed with options to flank, fall back, attack and more, and the military jargon spouted for running to locations or 'neutralising' an enemy sounds authentic, if a little robotic. The AI's reaction to being shot is similarly stilted, as though the sound files for each curse were recorded separately rather than flowing. Even the heat of battle allows even the most hardened soldier some reaction, surely.

Our adventure to the radar and afterwards to the enemy camp meant we had to direct the team via coordinates on the map and fumbling through the menu system to send them on their way. First thought was to send them in as bait. It was tactically stupid. While it drew out a few enemy soldiers that we sniped, one by one the symbols representing our team went from yellow (wounded) to red (dead).

The next time around we found out we could call in a naval barrage, so we sat back on the hillside and watched as shells shook the ground. The noise and visual feedback it created was incredible; as the screen shook a

Trophy congratulating us for calling in 'heavy rain' chimed over the barrage of high explosives as they slowly pounded the earth.

We wonder if Codemasters' timing is a little off, releasing a shooter only a month before the sequel to *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* hits the shelves. Of course, despite sharing a modern military theme and being shooters, *Flashpoint* and *Modern Warfare* are radically different: the latter prompts you where to go, what to do, and is a linear rollercoaster ride with astounding atmosphere. The former is far more technical with you as the driving force and offers far more freedom to achieve your goals. It's going to have to work hard to be noticed on the shelves next to Infinity Ward's next opus. **Paul Taylor**

WE SAY

- ↑ Awesome sound
- ↑ Tactically deep
- ↓ Unintuitive controls

OPS IS...
Going to bootcamp



IT'S LIKE...

FIFA 09



Power Up



SPONSORED BY FIFA

FIFA is now so successful that the brand is now officially sponsoring Swindon Town Football Club, a pommy mob who currently play in England's Coca-Cola League 1. Sure that's a couple down from the Premier League, but at least it's something. You won't see bloody Seabass and his *Pro Evolution* mob with their brand's name on jersey's any time soon. Come on, Seabass! Prove us wrong. Can you tell we're starting to miss the old FIFA-PES rivalry?

7 "Piggy-back rides for everyone!"

PS3 GENRE: SPORT | RELEASE: TBA 2009 | DISTRIBUTOR: EA | DEVELOPER: EA CANADA

FIFA 10

All hail the lord of balls

In general, balls are awesome things, but they reached new heights while being savaged into nets by the meat-eating boots of *FIFA 09*. Not one to let its balls go droopy, EA Canada has rededicated itself to football perfection with *FIFA 10* and refocused on what matters most – the relationship between ball and man.

If we had to use a wanky word to sum up our initial impressions of our preview build of *FIFA 10*, it'd be *organic*. Thanks to the new 360° movement, play on and around the ball feels far more intuitive, more natural. Players can slip and slide between lead-footed defenders while playing the ball off one foot, and jostling for possession is far more convincing than it was in last year's game. A forward's phenomenal speed, say, now allows them to keep defenders at bay for that extra moment longer. They're small but deep improvements.

Apart from that, EA Canada has taken to the gameplay blanket with a piping hot iron. The excessive vulnerability involved right after trapping a ball – gone. The nasty camera angle when defending in Be A Pro – changed. And then there are the additions. Fast free kicks are in while the AI has had its fair share of Weet Bix.

In fact we were astounded at just how astute the AI can be. Defensively, in particular, they mark tight and smart. The CPU is constantly sweating out silicon droplets as it reevaluates the best places to shuffle for an intercept. Meanwhile thanks to the AI's ability to position itself wisely and better defend their back third, pushing through brain-numbing thru-balls is no longer a guaranteed ticket to score. Goals have to be earned.

Like a saucy piece of football girlfriend fluff, the new set plays are also worthy to behold. Integrated into the game's returning practice mode, it allows players to pick a quadrant in their attacking third then program the movements of each of their players with a few simple commands. After syncing up everyone's movements, the play can be tested, saved, and mapped to one of the pad's directions for easy use during the glorious 90 minutes.

Kudos to EA Canada. Deep in its bunker, perhaps packed with Maradona fisting balls into nets, Zidane head butting walls, and the Italian team writhing on the ground on contact with mosquitos, they've set themselves up to bring us the best representation of the world game seen. And yet again to boot. Sorry.

James Ellis



7 "Wait, stop! Don't touch it!"

WE SAY

- ⬆ Football perfection? It's close
- ⬆ Content galore
- ⬇ Not a huge leap

OPS IS...
Dancing for Joy



IT'S LIKE...

Ninjas



Mini Me



Kung fu panda impersonator

INFO BYTE

The same dudes who did *Kane & Lynch* are developing this? Talk about your chalk and cheese!

PS3 GENRE: ACTION | RELEASE: SEPTEMBER | DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS | DEVELOPER: IO INTERACTIVE

MINI NINJAS

Who dat ninja?

Your initial reaction, upon viewing *Mini Ninjas*, might be, "Aren't I a little too old to be playing something of this calibre?" You may even find yourself jumping the gun and dismissing this title as something in the "strictly for kids" category, filed under "looks like a Wii game" and marked "far too cutesy for us tough as nails men and women of the gaming community". The reality is that *Mini Ninjas* walks the line, hovering somewhere between cartoony third-person, open-ish world, shuriken shenanigans and something that your little brother or sister would be more at home playing.

The plot is the usual claptrap of overwhelming forces of evil gathering against those that walk the righteous path, and with your ranks thinning as the conflict ensues, it's down to you, Hiro, to become the hero (sorry your master so desperately needs. The art

direction leans towards the minimalist end of the spectrum, adopting a strictly functional, less-is-more philosophy, and this tone is carried out throughout every aspect of *Mini Ninjas*, almost like a mission statement.

As you travel the land as Hiro, you have companions with specialised abilities you can easily access and switch into. Of the three we played, Hiro can use his spirit to take over animals and use them to attack enemies, and your somewhat larger compadre, Futo, is a manly, lumbering beast that packs a mean punch, and can be used to take on your more burly adversaries. We round out our trio with Suzume, who's subtle use of her flute lullabies enemies to sleep allowing her to scoot past undetected. You can switch between them at any point on the fly, which should lead to diversity and a fair amount of replayability.

You'll also master some pretty decent ninja skills, like locating temples to unlock new spells, fire shuriken for a ranged attack, get your flame on with some targeted fireballs or lay waste to whole groups of ronin with a lightning storm. As far as boss battles go, it's old school all the way. Recognise the pattern, find the weakness, and exploit, with most playing out like the *God of War* mini-games – albeit a more simplified version, anyway.

There's always a risk trying to capture an "all ages" audience, if it's too juvenile, you'll alienate

This ninja's first problem? He's not a turtle



NINJA, NINJA RAP

One thing severely lacking in the gaming/ninjitsu arena has been the good ol' Yankee Doodle Dandy version of the star-tossing, katana-wielding, smoke-bomb poppin', sneaky-sneaky, light-stepping warriors of the night. We've had enough of the 'classic' Japanese-styled *Tenchu*, *Raiden* or *Shinobi*. How about letting loose a little something something infused with a taste of the stars and stripes, ala Remo Williams, unarmed and dangerous – or the original American Ninja, Michael Dudikoff? Let's get ridiculous! Oh, and the two dudes from the *G.I. Joe* game don't count.

your older gamers; make it too difficult, and kids will shy away from it. Not without its charm, experienced gamers will barely break a sweat from what we've seen so far. We look forward to seeing if our next looksee bears more challenging fruit. **Dave Kozicki**

WE SAY

- ↑ Chop and change characters
- ↑ Diverse moves
- ↓ Repetitive, too kiddie?



OPS IS...
Rolling the dice



IT'S LIKE...

Hacking and slashing



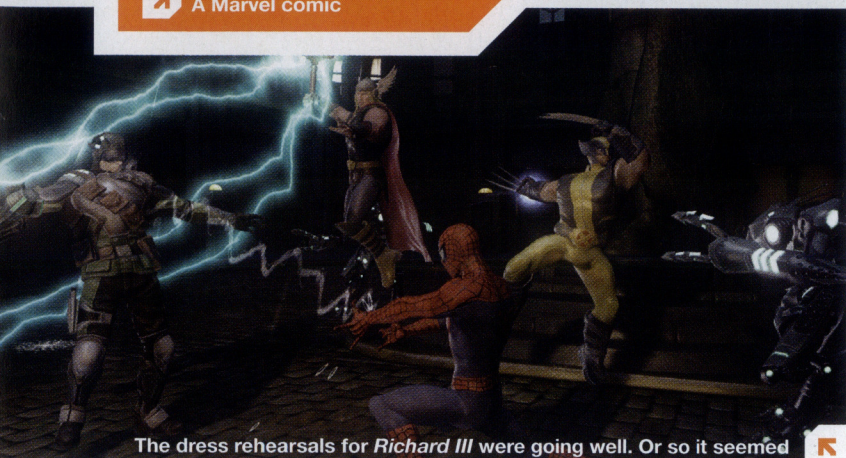
A Marvel comic



"Taste my foot"



We're really not sure what's happening here



The dress rehearsals for *Richard III* were going well. Or so it seemed

PS3 GENRE: ACTION | RELEASE: SEPTEMBER | DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION | DEVELOPER: VICARIOUS VISIONS

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE 2

With our powers combined...

There's something gratifying about picking off a foe with a laser-like unibeam. It's cooler, though, when you and your friend with the alarming claws double-team, shooting your beam towards his blades and take out the goon and his posse in a blast of refracted energy. You deserve to give your teammate a high five when you pull it off, and this feature that Activision have labelled 'fusion' is probably the most significant addition compared to *MUA*.

Fans of the original will be familiar with the formula: loads of dungeon-style crawling with waves of chumps to smack around, followed by a boss fight. This time you should anticipate more environmental destruction and, of course, show-boating fusion powers to add to the *Alliance* repertoire.

'Fusion' isn't limited to two specific characters; with an extended roster of 20-odd heroes and villains (including faces that should've been in there the first time, like Hulk and Juggernaut), 'wouldn't it be cool if' opportunities are plentiful and tantalising.

Executing the fusion in single player is a matter of pressing a shoulder button and a corresponding button for each character in your group to initiate the attack. In multi – the way this game ought to be played – both you and your best-suited team-mate must figure out when to flex your superpowers. It's another way that team-work is promoted over the super-ego of a superhero; give your enemy a one-two by turning them to pulp with the Hulk while Iron Man rains attacks from above.

Melee attacks only go so far in sending clods on their way, and the ability to lob cars is reserved for meatier protagonists; as manly as he is, Captain America just doesn't have the grunt needed to pick up a sedan and turn it into a missile. This defect shouldn't be surprising: your characters are only human. Should they decide a nap on the ground is easier than whaling on opponents, team mates can come to the rescue and resuscitate. If you're lacking the requisite number of human players to make a party of four, that spare AI character can be

swapped on the fly with your own if you figure the computer-controlled Spider-Man could be put to better use.

We're cautiously optimistic about *MUA2*. Our hands-on time showed great promise, and we're looking forward to exploiting the dearth of combinations the fusion system allows. Still, the original *Alliance* remains as one of our favourite co-op games and we hope there's more new tricks that'll keep comic nerds, players and comic-nerd gamers happy. **Paul Taylor**



STAN THE MAN

Stan Lee's cameos in the Marvel films are purely for show: his 'character' hasn't affected the plot of one of the films. Expect him to be involved more with *MUA 2*, as Lee lends his likeness and voice to a character that is an integral part of the storyline. Stay tuned.

WE SAY

- Switching characters mid-fight
- Fusion powers
- Could be repetitive



OPS IS...
Looking for a disguise

INCOMING

WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2010

IT'S LIKE...

WWE



Choose Your Own Adventure



“This has got to be the smoothest playing and most easily accessible version yet”

PS3 GENRE: SPORTS SIM | RELEASE: OCTOBER 2009 | DISTRIBUTOR: THQ | DEVELOPER: YUKE'S MEDIA CREATIONS

WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2010

Step up and in to the square ring, if you dare

User generated content. That, along with “verticality”, “destructible environments” and “cel-shaded” are buzzwords that the industry uses to get journalists juices flowing about the next big thing in video games. The sad fact is that most of the time, it's only mere lip service, or has a crutch that almost renders the process moot.

Look at *LittleBigPlanet*, or more the point, the balls-up with the user content. Many games enthusiasts were chomping at the bit to get some original levels or knock out a homage to iconic movies and characters until Sony stepped in and put the kibosh on it, weeding out the latter and somewhat spaying and neutering the whole thing.

What does this have to do with *WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2010*, you ask? A lot. You see, THQ has created some kind of monstrous hybrid from its titles, meshing the look and feel of *UFC Undisputed* coupled with the ridiculous depth of the character customisation system from *Saint's Row 2* to help you create your own

bonafide wrestler, complete with an up to 10 year history, signature moves and the ability to upload it online and show it off to the world. Lofty goals indeed. What's scarier is, it looks like it might just payoff.

To be frank, we got more than a little overwhelmed with the myriad customisation options available. Not only can you get intricate with body shapes, sex, hair, face structure, you can add tattoos, piercings and access licensed clothing for the very first time. Then take a look at the way your wrestler enters the ring. The blow-by-blow breakdown of the fanfare is impressive. You can pick the way they hit centre stage, what's playing on the jumbo-tron in the background, how they move down the ramp, the way they enter the ring, the camera angles for each section, the lighting... If you want fireworks, choose exactly when you trigger them, down to the second. It's so intricate it's absolutely astounding, and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

You can take all the above features and

flesh out your wrestler's back story in an incredible amount of detail, running up to 10 years back, with any number of scripted events and characters for him/her to go up against. It's like having your very own malleable version of the WWE. You can work out the camera, even tailor the emotion of the crowd to your liking and have branching story arcs for your wrestler depending on a win or a loss, and how much time you've got on your hands to invest in crafting the plot. It's like a *Choose Your Own Adventure* story; with the only limit your time, imagination and dedication.

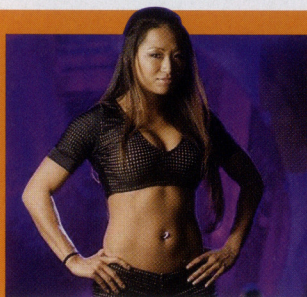
This has got to be the smoothest playing and most easily accessible version yet, and is surprisingly similar to *UFC Undisputed* (maybe not so surprising since Yuke's developed



Not pictured: empty baby oil bottles



Limbo: you're doing it wrong



BRINGING SEXY BACK

WWE is taking care of the ladies (and those of us who'd rather look at the ladies) by introducing playable Divas into the roster, and you can use them in your character creation sessions. We can't speak for the rest of you, but as much as we love watching Cena, The Undertaker, Ray Mysterio and Triple H knock the living snot out of each other, we get an equal (perhaps more?) amount of enjoyment watching some nicely toned mamas (like Gail Kim above) going toe to toe. Who's with us?

both titles). The wrestler character models are spot on, and probably the most lifelike we've seen. After the grandiose entrances and fanfare you get amongst it. Gone are the health bars and other such nonsense cluttering up the screen, with just a solitary ring laid down at your wrestler's feet. This is your momentum bar, and once it's maxed out, you'll be able to use Signature moves and Finishers as prompted by quick time events. In fact, the gameplay is littered with such events, like prompt to hit **[X]** for a reversal, or when to pin, or break submission holds. It's extremely smooth and plays out like a simplified version of *UFC Undisputed* with your right thumbstick controlling all things submissiony (it's a word, look it up). Within no time, you'll be tossing opponents into the rope, smashing faces into turnbuckles and high flying off the top rope with devastating effect, and that's just the way we like it.

We've gotta admit, we're more than a tad impressed with this latest offering from one of

most popular sporting franchises around. The US fan base is huge, obsessive, and extremely vocal about what they want to see in the latest version of title. Yuke's has monitored the feedback and crafted a substantially interactive experience, which not only harnesses the fist to face action, but also delves across into the soap opera drama/comedy as well, to sate even the most discerning WWE fan's appetite. Do you smell what 2010 is cooking? We do. Kinds smells like victory. **- Dave Kozicki**

WE SAY

- ↑ Sweet graphics
- ↑ Intuitive controls
- ↑ Deep creation modes

OPS IS...
Ready to lay the smack down



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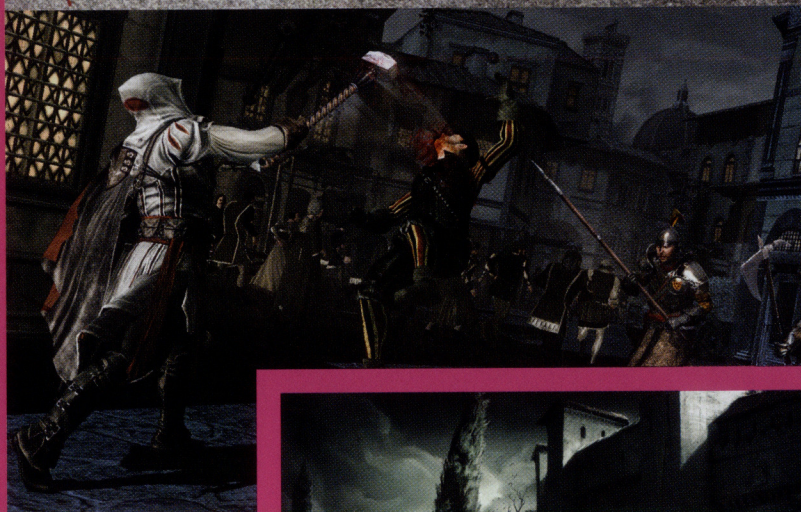
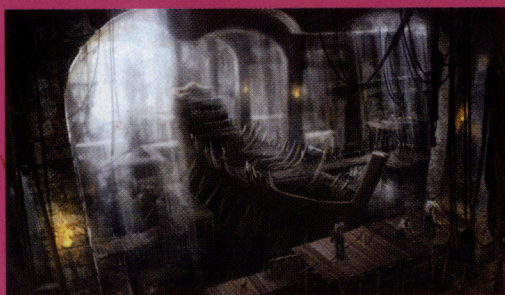
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INDEPTH

Assassin's Creed II Interview



DIRTY CREEDS (DONE DIRT CHEAP)

Producer Sébastien Puel and creative director Patrice Desilets talk *Assassin's Creed II*, how killing is their business, and why business is good...

OPS: What are the specific technologies you developed for *Assassin's Creed II*? Are there any particular achievements you're proud of?

PD: What I'm particularly proud of is the new game architecture allowing much more diverse gameplay and missions in our engine. We also have enhanced NPC navigation showcasing parkour-like acrobatics that will spice up the chases and escape missions in the game.

Now, for the visuals, the *Assassin's Creed* game engine – Anvil – got some awesome new technical features that let us create a world with an even better visual treatment.

We have many new technicalities we added in the engine that affect the graphics in the game and improve the overall visual treatment: night and day cycle, new load distance for more detailed open-world environment from greater distances, the same internal vegetation technology used in *Far Cry 2*, several rendering improvements to support improved lighting, reflection and more special effects, new cloth system used extensively for characters.

Beyond the technical achievements, the very location we chose poised us to make a visually outstanding game. Cities like Florence and Venice are amongst the most stunning landscapes in the world and all the technology we developed just served this purpose, made you feel this beauty. We are not only recreating the architecture but also everything that makes Italy so unique during the 15th Century – from the special lighting of Venice to the colourful carnival disguises. Every minor detail was important for the artists and they are very excited for players to get their hands on the game and explore such a stunning city.

OPS: How is *Assassin's Creed* linked with *Assassin's Creed II*?

SP: *Assassin's Creed II* is the sequel to *Assassin's Creed*. The events in the present start right where the first game left off but the Animus will plunge you into a very different and fresh historical period. Overall we are building on the strengths on the first episode, its unique sense of freedom and immersion and adding a lot more depth, variety and scope to the core gameplay. Storywise, Ezio

is a descendant of Altair and the connection between the two games will be revealed through an encoded book very much like the one Leonardo Da Vinci is famous for writing.

Once again, Desmond will be exploring his DNA to relive an ancestor's life, however this time it with a very different goal and it's a very different kind of ancestor. Ezio Auditore Da Firenze, a nobleman who lived at the end of the 15th Century in Italy is our new hero. His family is betrayed and murdered by the ruling families of Italy, and Ezio must uncover the arts of his ancestors in order to avenge their death. To his allies, he will become a force for change – fighting for freedom and justice. To his enemies, he will become a boogey man – dedicated to the destruction of the tyrants of Italy. Through Ezio's quest for vengeance, Desmond and the present day Assassins will uncover the crucial piece of the conspiracy that was hinted at in the first *Assassin's Creed* game. The Templar/Abstergo plot is bigger than could have been imagined with consequences reaching to every detail of modern life as we know it.

OPS: The entire game play/mission structure in *Assassin's Creed* was semi-linear and kept the same structure through the nine assassinations. Will *Assassin's Creed II* feature more missions and a wider variety in the structure and how the story unfolds?

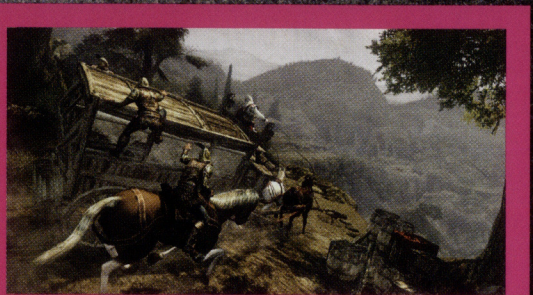
SP: The game structure and the mission system were the most crucial elements we wanted to improve on. We are redefining the overall mission structure to give gamers a more fun, rewarding and unpredictable experience throughout the game by adding a lot of variety in missions types and changing the way the story and the missions unfold. There are no more patterns of missions to perform but rather a story that develops through a great amount of mission giving characters. Some characters will give you an assassination mission, others an escort/protect mission while some will give you a chase mission, et cetera. There is no limit to the types of challenges we will give players. We invested most of our development time in ensuring that there is a huge amount of

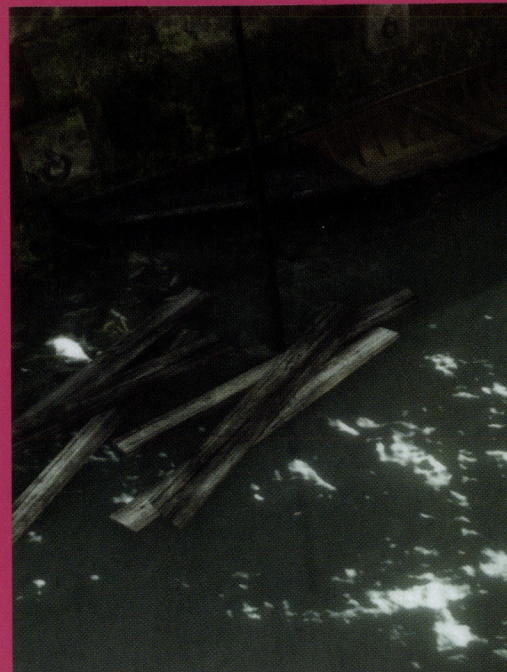
variety and depth in the missions required to finish the story. But we also want the player to have a real freedom and opportunity to explore and 'use' the world we have created at their own pace. Cities are now filled with a ton of missions that the player can do if she chooses: for instance, you can now decide to get rid of witnesses if you feel you are becoming too notorious after a not-so-stealthy assassination, or help thieves pursued by guards. These tasks are optional but will bring you interesting rewards if you accept to fulfil them.

OPS: Crowd interaction was one of the big promises of *Assassin's Creed*. How will you improve the crowd interaction for the second game and the role of the NPCs?

SP: In *Assassin's Creed II*, you have been betrayed by the ruling families of Italy – you will have to learn how to interact and use the 'common people' or, like we call them in the game, 'the underworld', to get your revenge. So you can generally consider that the crowd is on your side – except, of course, if you behave too badly! First, any crowd NPC can help you to hide – just go into a group and press the blend button to enter a crowd and lower your chances of being noticed by guards. The crowd can help you to walk through the city unnoticed but isn't 100 per cent detection proof as some classes of guards actively search you out even in hiding spots.

We have also added a new 'notoriety system'. Your actions in the city will impact your notoriety, break the law one too many times and you will become 'wanted' in the city. ➤





OPS: Can you tell us more about the new notoriety system?

SP: The notoriety system monitors your actions. The more commotion you cause in the city, such as killing innocents, the more notorious you become: people will become more aware of your actions and the authorities will search for you. If you are notorious, you have a much higher chance of being seen by patrolling guards even if you're trying to blend your way through. There are various ways to decrease your level of notoriety and return to an anonymous state: assassinate witnesses, bribe a herald, get rid of warrant posters with your face on them.

Ezio's and Altair's outfits were inspired by the eagle as well. For example, their hood was designed like the beak of an eagle.

OPS: Can you give us more details regarding the economic system?

SP: The economic system is a totally new feature in *Assassin's Creed II* that adds a lot of depth to the overall gameplay. As a player, you will be able to collect and use the in-game currency to enhance your gameplay experience.

Income will come in many different ways. You can gain money by completing some missions or find treasures that are scattered in the city. The crowd is also a good resource: you can now pickpocket anyone in the crowd. However Ezio will have to be careful as he is not the only one who pickpockets and can be caught red-handed. The assassin will also have the ability to strip/loot soldiers of their wealth once they have been battered and weakened.

Gaining money allows the assassin to make the most of the tools at his disposal. Throwing daggers, smoke bombs and other resources specifically tailored to the Assassins can be purchased in the game's various shops. Also, as Leonardo helps you decode the codex written by Altair, he will discover sketches to build special weapon upgrades.

Ezio has many friends in the city and in exchange for money, members of the main factions – thief, courtesan and mercenary – can be hired to help him elude, distract or even defeat his enemies. For the right price, members of the three factions will help Ezio. This is what we call the 'favour system'.

OPS: Tell us more about this favour system.

SP: You can also use certain groups or 'factions' to perform specific actions. There are three main factions in the game: the thieves, the courtesans and the mercenaries. Through the game, you will meet their leaders, for example, Antonio, the cunning thief leader who will ask you to do certain missions for him. Once you gain Antonio's trust, the members of the thief guild will be fully operational to help you perform specific tasks. For example, the courtesans will be able to go seduce and distract groups of guards letting Ezio sneak past them unnoticed. Using factions and their unique special abilities adds a whole layer of strategy to the game.

OPS: Can you reveal to us more about Ezio's new hidden blade upgrades?

SP: Leonardo Da Vinci is the man behind the various hidden blade upgrades you'll discover. One of those last stage upgrades is the hidden gun blade that you see at the end of the E3 trailer. The hidden gun lets you load one bullet at a time so players will have to strategically choose when they want to use it. Players will be able to buy bullets at various shops.

Another upgrade is the double blade which gives Ezio a secondary blade on his left arm. And there are many others...

Additionally, Ezio will get to upgrade his assassin outfit with various armour parts.

OPS: Can you elaborate on that?

PD: At E3, you've learned that there is an economic system that lets the assassin collect money through various ways and make the most of the tools at his disposal. Weapons, tools, ammo, faction service, and doctors

“Every minor detail was important for the artists and they are very excited”

PATRICE DESILETS

OPS: What is the significance behind the name of Ezio?

SP: Ezio is derived from the word Aietos (Old Greek) and Aetius (Latin) and means "eagle". The name Ezio was popularised in Italy based on the historical hero Flavius Aëtius – a 5th Century Roman general who defeated Attila the Hun at the Battle of Chalons.

The choice of the name Ezio follows the tradition of naming our hero based on the eagle icon. Ezio like Altair will track his target, circle waiting for the right moment, and then strike with a single killing blow.



“Our hero is able to keep his five fingers, thanks to... Leonardo Da Vinci”

SÉBASTIEN PUEL

OPS: Did you do any research to help you design the new setting?

SP: The core team members went to Italy and visited each city assisted by a guide who explained the story behind each building, street and corner of the environment. We also took a lot of pictures of the buildings from that time to use as references for the game. So early 2008, right after our visit to Italy, we started to build our first sections of Venice. Our art team is doing an amazing job of recreating the 15th Century Italy. Mohamed Gambouz, our art director, is working closely with the world and characters team so that they paint an accurate picture for the gamers. The main challenge is really to recreate the cities as they would have looked in the 15th Century. This requires lots of research. For example, there is little information on how the Rialto Bridge in Venice looked like in the 15th Century since it burnt down around the time our game is set. The only thing we knew is that it was made of wood. Therefore, we designed the bridge based on what it looks like today but in wood.


OPS: We've noticed Ezio has all his five fingers compared to Altair who only had four due to the Assassin's brotherhood initiation. How do you explain that?

SP: Back in the Middle Ages, cutting fingers off was part of the initiation process to become an Assassin and be accepted in the brotherhood. In *Assassin's Creed II*, 300 years later, customs and technologies are changing and our hero is able to keep his five fingers, thanks to the genius inventions of Leonardo Da Vinci.

OPS: Who guides you to be historically and architecturally accurate when recreating cities like Venice or events like the Pazzi conspiracy?

SP: We are lucky to have an architect, with a master's degree in history and theory of architecture on the team. She does all the historical researches on architecture, political events and social aspects of the game. We are in contact with Margaret Meserve, assistant professor of History at University of Notre Dame, who is reviewing the script and giving us advice on what we can and can't do for the scenario of the game to be as accurate as possible.

OPS: How about connectivity between the PS3 and the PSP versions?

SP: Definitely! As players unlock health and Hidden blade upgrades in *Assassin's Creed II*, the same upgrades will be unlocked in *Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines*. It also works the other way round: on the PS3 you will be able to access any Templar Coins and special weapons you've collected on the PSP. 

will be available for our assassin to spend his hard-earned money. There is still much to reveal to what players can do with their money.

In *Assassin's Creed II*, there will be an armour upgrade system where Ezio will be able to upgrade various armour parts: shoulders, chest, boots, etcetera. There will be different armour ranks and each of them will offer better protection as well as a new look to Ezio. Also, there will be tailors in *Assassin's Creed II* that will be able to customize the colour of Ezio's outfit.

OPS: What can you tell us about other locations?

SP: The countryside will play more of a central gameplay role in *Assassin's Creed II*. There will be smaller cities in the countryside with specific missions and stories for Ezio to engage in. I'll let you guess what they can be. In *Assassin's Creed*, we had one big kingdom but this time we have various regions in the countryside and each of those regions has its own look and feel. For instance, you'll get to visit the famous Tuscany region, known for its beautiful and fertile fields. It's a real treat for the eyes and will give a lot of variety to our game both in terms of visuals and gameplay.

PD: Ezio is a young noble born from the city of Florence. He will live the beginning of his life in the city that is considered the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance. His family is well respected by the Florentine society. Florence is known for having some of the most beautiful churches and monuments to come out of the Renaissance. The most prestigious and dominant building in Florence is Santa Maria del Fiore, also known as The

Duomo. There are many other landmarks that players will want to discover: Santa Croce, Palazzo Vecchio, Ponte Vecchio, Santa Maria Novella etc. The first sequence of the game will be set in Florence and players will get to meet Ezio's family, friends and his enemies.

As the game progresses, Ezio will have to travel to various cities and regions. There is of course Venice, as you have discovered in the E3 demo, and this is just a small portion of the world of *Assassin's Creed II*. Players will discover the famous Tuscany as the town of San Gimignano. Beside Tuscany and San Gimignano, there are the mountain regions that players will have to go through on their first journey to Venice.

Another region players will get to discover is the wetlands, situated to the west of Florence. This region is known for its continuous flood, cloudy weather and its various aquatic plants. Players will get to explore and perform various missions in the city of Forlì, deep within the Wetlands.

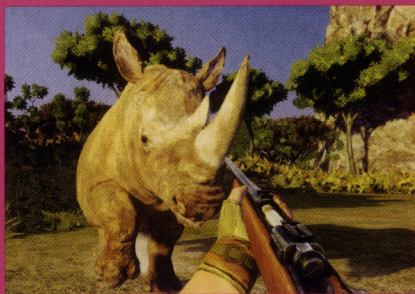
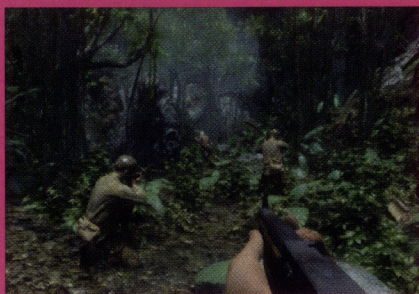
It was important for us that each city, regions and sub city have an important role in the game. We didn't want the countryside to be a simple walk in the park for the players. They will all have their role in the game and will require players to invest time in them. Each region will have its main, secondary missions. There will be lots of exploration and time investment for the player to discover all the secrets behind each location.

Ezio can control a horse carriage in the Italian countryside to reach his destination faster and escort people alongside it. Guards will try to jump aboard the carriage... This is one of the surprises we have in store for the player.

Words: Anthony O'Connor

FUBAR

It stands for F--ked Up Beyond All Recognition and is an apt, albeit sailorish, way to describe some of the games we've had to review over the years. We were curious, so we put on our hats and left the office to investigate this phenomenon. You can send our Walkley Award to the address on the inside cover



At OPS we get a lot of mileage out of giving bad games crap. How many times can we rag on *Lair*? A lot, apparently. That game in particular is an example of extremely high potential resulting in an extremely poor product.

The thing is, we're like you. Oh sure, we're better looking and smell less like old ham, but it's not like we want games to be bad.

Bad games = unhappy gamers. On a purely mercenary level unhappy gamers means fewer game magazines.

It's not like we have other jobs we can do. We've committed to a life of sitting in front of big screens for hundreds of hours, tweaking knobs and mashing buttons, then trying to describe the experience in human words.

This IS our day job!

So to bridge the gap somewhat 'twixt creator and cretin, we've done some asking around, investigated some of the stinky potatoes that have been dropped and found out some of the reasons why games go average, bad or downright FUBAR.

PLEASE NOTE: The interviews we conducted were with real people, some of them currently working for the very companies they're talking about. To that end, we've kept our sources secret. So what makes games FUBAR?

NO IDEA

MR. ED currently works for a company that is going to release a game. They think. One day. Now games take a long time to make in the normal scheme of things, but MR. ED has some specific theories on why his company in particular is dog paddling rather than swimming:

"The creator has to know what he or she wants. Ours does not. You need a strong concept straight out of the gate and without

that the problems just trickle down to every other part of the process."

MR. ED's company continues to work on their product. When asked for an educated guess at a release date he just snorted and ate some hay. Actually he just shrugged, but Mr. Ed rules. A talking horse. Genius idea! Speaking of genius ideas we have...

LOADS OF IDEAS... ALL BAD

Bob-the-Kelpie is able to be a little more frank as he no longer works for the company he's describing - mainly because it doesn't exist anymore.

"I was a writer for a now bankrupt company called Brilliant Interactive Ideas aka: BII." Bob told us. "They had a bunch of pretty sweet licenses like Superman and Xena and some kiddie horror novels. There was a lot of talent there but the problem was with the product itself. On a fundamental level it was just a bad idea - but Bloody Idiotic Ideas is a terrible name for a company.

"You know those 'Choose Your Own Adventure' novels you read when

“The creator has to know what he or she wants. Ours does not”

MR. ED



you were a kid? It was like that. Except they called them 'Interactive Movies'. Now a real interactive movie would be one where you could fight Darth Vader or make sweaty sex with the hot chick. These just played different animations. It was like watching really long cut scenes for a game you never got to play. We'd have these surreal staff meetings where the staff would suggest all these improvements and the boss would nod and then... disagree with them all.

“Be suspicious of games that come out around March”

“BRIAN”

“It was like watching the Titanic hit the iceberg and get blown up by aliens at the same time. In slow motion. Despite having dozens of animators everything moved slowly so when they finally saw release they looked dated and silly.”

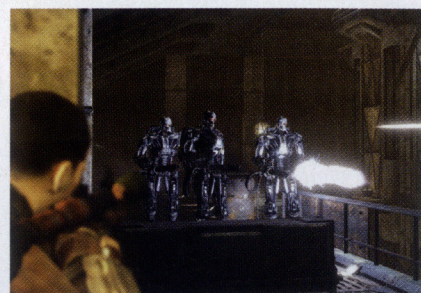
So the “Interactive Movies” were released?
“Yes. Minimally. I saw one I wrote, actually, in a bargain bin in a video shop. A chick picked it up. Looked at it and put it back. It retailed for \$4.95 and she put it back. Brilliant ideas indeed.”

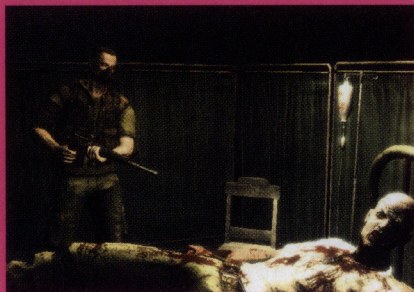
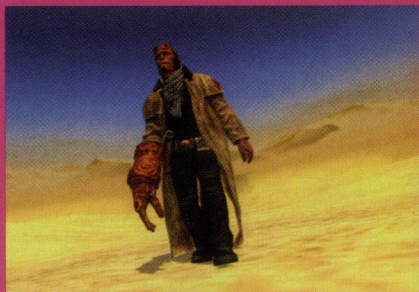
THE GOLDEN RULE (HE WHO HAS THE GOLD MAKES THE RULES)

So just say you know what you want to make, you make it but you're not ready when the deadline rolls around. It happens to the best companies. Look at Rockstar Games: the delay with *GTA IV* and now *Red Dead Redemption*. These delays don't just affect gamers who have to wait another bloody six months, but won't someone think of the erm... shareholders?

We talked with “Brian” about a game he was involved with tangentially. It was one of those close-but-no-cigar FUBAR titles and he had a theory that was a lot less esoteric than many people we talked to.

“Look, it's a business. Your triple-A titles have got so much – money and a fan base →





– behind them you forget the smaller companies have to conform to much stricter deadlines.

"Look, I can't say which game it was but be suspicious of games that come out around March."

Huh?

"It's the end of the European Financial Year. Unless you're with one of the big boys – and sometimes even then – the publisher can have a hard deadline and feel like they're taking a punt. A lot of people panic and release whatever they've got in whatever condition it's in. Even if it's not shaping up, tough: it's still going to market. The idea behind that being there's no further risk, no further expenditure and to the shareholders it appears the company has been smart and cut the losses. Then, of course, the reviews and sales figures start coming in... but that's another story.

"I'll leave you with this: if a game comes out around March, and it's looking a bit rough and you wonder, 'why the hell didn't they give that another month or so?' the finger shouldn't always be pointed at the creators."

“How the hell are you supposed to talk up something you don't know about?”

"DAVE"

PUBLICALLY RELATE, PRIVATELY BERATE

With an idea turned into product and released onto a potentially hostile market – after surviving script changes, budget cuts, companies being bought out and hard deadlines – the penultimate step is the game being shown to the gaming press. A former PR man for now defunct Australian distributor Red-Ant, "Dave", shed some light on the pinging part of the process.

"What surprised me about a lot of the PR, especially at Red-Ant, was they weren't gamers! How the hell are you supposed to talk up something you don't know about?"

We asked him how do you make a shocker

of a title sound good?

"There's a bunch of ways. If you're a gamer, and you're coming from a position of at least a bit of authority and knowledge, you can focus on certain things. Like 'the world is twice the size of *Oblivion*' or 'combat is really exciting' or 'it sold really well in Japan.' But to be honest one of the best techniques is, well, to be honest.

"I was a games journo prior to Red-Ant and I'm one again now, so you can tell when someone's feeding you bullshit. The phrase 'niche market' was always a good one. I tried to be as honest as I could. I'd play the games and give my real opinion. But there's a perception out there that games live or die or the back of good or bad reviews and that's simply not true. One of our biggest sellers was *Armored Core 4* for the PS3 and that was not a game that reviewed well. It just had a large fan base."

We wanted to know that now he was out of the PR hype machine, was there any tricks used that he would, could and should share.

"If the game is getting a release in the next



week or fortnight and you've hardly seen any code at all at the mag? It's probably going to suck. But that's no secret, people on both sides of the industry know that. Same with press embargoes. They hardly ever work but some companies insist on using them. I always tried to be as honest as possible. Because if a game journo has lowered expectations they're more likely to score more even-handedly. Having said that I always thought *Stranglehold* got a raw deal with sixes and sevens. That game was a solid eight and that's me talking as a gamer not a PR drone.

"There are a lot of games that people expect to be pretty average and consequently they often just get burnt out in time for deadline. Movie tie-ins, sequels in series that should have been put out to pasture ages ago and comic book games would usually suck. That's starting to change now, slowly, but way back when you expected a movie tie-in to be terrible it frequently was."

IN CONCLUSION...

The relationship between an industry and a specialty magazine, or website for that

matter, is an interesting one. It's no big secret, after all, that commercial magazines need advertisements. That's business. They also, however, need honest editorial. You'll read glowing reviews in *OPS*, and you'll read damning ones. Publishers take the good with the bad because, realistically, duds happen.

After talking to these industry insiders, and indeed many we simply don't have room for, it's a bloody marvel that any games are good at all. There appears to be so much that can go wrong along the way to derail the best intentions. It almost always involves money.

So while we exist in a world where fantastic games like *inFamous* and *MGS4* exist, spare a thought for the *Lairs* of the world. Because they didn't set out to make a bad game. They weren't sitting around a hologram-filled table with specs on how to make the dragons look crappy, the textures flicker or the controls clunky. They were trying to make an awesome dragon combat game.

While we won't stop sticking the boot into games that have it coming – and there are always going to be games that have it coming – we do so now with a more educated boot. 🐉

SHIFTING UP A GEAR

Jesse Abney, producer of *Need for Speed SHIFT*, talks cars, crashes and plans for Holden and Ford. This is the new shift...

OPS: Tell us the reason behind producing a sim racing game.

JA: The franchise is nearly 15 years old, and our fan base has really grown up with us, and then looking into their interests and passions, and over the last two years we found that a fairly large group of them, their interests had been shifting along with the rest of the of the automotive industry into more serious, more authentic racing games. By trying to do just one title a year, every year, we really weren't catering to the broad interests of the racing genre, and that really falls, for *Need For Speed* anyway, across three separate sub genres of action, arcade and simulation. By

establishing a rapport with our fan base we began to realise that their interests, a large percentage of their interests, were very specific to one of those three sub-genres. And so we announced last year that we would diversify the franchise, focus down on design and developers that help us hit those sub-genres with a high quality mark and allow us more than a year turn around time between design and development of each version. What we have locked and loaded in the pipe when we made that announcement are three unique *Need For Speeds*. On the Wii, we have EA Montreal, who's an established Wii developer, doing the *Nitro* game, very arcade, very specific

to that platform, meanwhile we had Slightly Mad Studios bringing us our next generation racing game in *SHIFT*, and highlighting their brand new simulation racing engine, and *World Online* was announced as our PC online-only title, which satisfied the action open-world, massively multiplayer segment.

SHIFT very much represents our authentic racing game, while it's built upon a real world force physics simulator in the Slightly Mad Studios engine, it is more an authentic racing game; it more harnesses the tenets of *Need For Speed* and brings a fun, pick up and play, fast paced and innovative game to the simulation racing space.

OPS: Considering other racing games that have come out over the last few years, the influence they must've had, it sounds like you're trying to do a lot like what Codemasters did with its title *GRID*, with the aspect of simulation and drifting. Did *GRID* have an influence on *SHIFT*?

JA: Yeah, both *GRID* and *DIRT* are considered the high benchmarks marks of their segment. They're accessible to all styles of players; they're not so hardcore at one end of the spectrum like *Gran Turismo* and *Forza* are. We understand that *Need For Speed* doesn't really compete in that space, but *SHIFT* does compete squarely with what Codies did with *GRID* and *DIRT*. We play those games, we love 'em, they've done a lot of stuff right, we've seen them start to tap in to some very



Driving fast and looking good. Just like us



innovative areas that we think *SHIFT* is pushing ahead in even further. And so, lots of respect to Codies, the work they've done, and just teaching us a lesson in innovation on next generation consoles, really paving the road for us to innovate further in a number of ways that Slightly Mad Studios is doing with *SHIFT*.

OPS: One of the things that really impressed us at E3 was the sound of *SHIFT*. For instance, backing off the throttle would create a real burble. Can you tell us a bit about the process of making these sounds?

JA: Dr. Stephen Baysted at Slightly Mad Studios, he's a physics, sound and audio engineer professor. He starts with the source; not only dynamometer captures of real world engines, naturally aspirated, turbo charge et cetera, but capturing cars on the track. Having dyno time gives a number of elements, but also having cars on the track, rigged with very expensive audio recording devices, allows us to capture the raw source of surface types, the gravel types, the backfires, the engines and

“[*SHIFT*] brings a fun, pick up and play, fast paced and innovative game to the simulation racing space”



all of the nuanced sounds that are layered into the *SHIFT* sound engine. All that quality effect starts with the source. It's really hard to fake it; you either have it or you don't. By having multiple layers in the source, by having a car on the track we have the ability to layer in all those real world elements in to the sound engine. The camera position in the game [is also important, as] you'll note that the audio inside the cockpit is very different from the audio effect of the camera view outside the car. There's also the fact of collisions, and the collisions in *SHIFT* are modelled on metal-on-metal and some of the process that the guys at Slightly Mad Studios took were actually raising cars on cranes and smashing them together.

Another cool anecdote that Stephen tells is on one occasion is when they had one of their race cars rigged with audio equipment, it actually crashed – thankfully no one was hurt – and what they got out of that was a tremendous real world library of effects: the

reality of a car colliding with a wall and coming apart in pieces. A number of those elements are in *SHIFT*. The collisions, the tyres on the surfaces, on track, off track sound effects as well as the car-to-car impacts taken from those actual elements.

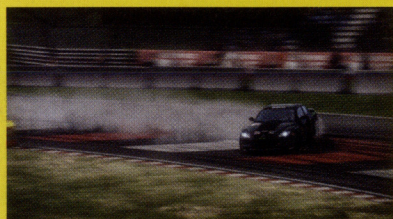
OPS: We know the BMW M3 GT2 is the hero car, what are the other cars that will be available?

JA: We have an interest in keeping a lot of mainstay vehicles in *Need For Speed*, we're always working with manufacturers to release brand new models; the GT2 class BMW is an example of that. We've never had something quite that serious in *SHIFT* and it just goes towards the authenticity of that style of racing game that we're presenting this year.

It's much more in line with the WTCO and LMS series, and so what we have is a number of cars in the prototype range, a number of cars in the LMS range, and a number of not-



Both the Nissan 350Z and 370Z feature



yet-seen cars that are traditional for *Need For Speed* to release in their games, yearly. The Porsche RSR, Audi R8 LMS, Maseratti MC12, Zonda F, brand new never before seen on the street never mind in a videogame, so these very serious, very exotic, true-to-life cars are making a debut in *SHIFT*.

OPS: What are you most proud of in *SHIFT*?

JA: The stuff we've been talking about to date with the true driver experience, the cockpit cam, the real innovative way Slightly Mad Studios and Patrick [Söderlund] have crafted the experience of being behind the wheel of these cars is some of the most innovative aspects of the game. It's the visual and visceral intensity of taming these 700-plus horsepower beasts on the track that's really played up in *SHIFT* from the cockpit cam. It's the AI having human fallibility traits while you're in a race; they're prone to make mistakes in the same manner that you might and even though you're not involved in some of the instances on the track they are happening rather organically.

I feel that all of those things playing in concert is what draws you into the action and keeps it exciting, keeps it new and fresh

from event to event. And that True Driver's Experience, that's a whole laundry list of effects we've crafted over a year-and-a-half of design and development to what it feels like to be a race car driver handling these cars at the edge of control, and even with the all-new crash dynamic, what does it look like to a race car driver when he loses control. Our intense crash audio; for the first time you hear the driver's heartbeat and [his] breathing when things become very intense, and all of that is a tool for immersion, really drawing the player in further.

That only goes so far, though, then you have the third dimension of that which is the AI, which again is just organically evolving on the track; as you're experiencing the race the AI is experiencing the race, and some pretty cool things are gonna happen the more and more you play.

OPS: This is the first time that you and Slightly Mad Studios have teamed up. What have they brought to the development of *SHIFT*?

JA: A number of things. They're a triple-A simulation race-car developer. *GT*, *GT Legends*, *GT 2* are all critically acclaimed PC

simulation racing games. These guys have a huge passion for the genre and for automotive motor sports. Being in the heart of Europe in England, they're well integrated in to the [race car] culture. They don't just sit behind desks; they have a deep understanding both through

“...these very serious, very exotic, true-to-life cars are making a debut in *SHIFT*”

their cultural ties to automotive motorsport as well as their participation. Many of these guys have [spent] hundreds of hours on the track; they have race cars, they have a passion and an interest for the industry and so all that translates pretty well in their past games. Through our commitment and our announcement to find the right developer for the right design for *Need For Speed*, [we] landed on Slightly Mad Studios. It was just a natural pairing of the right passion with the right project.



FORD-ING AHEAD AND HOLDEN ON

Need For Speed has undergone dramatic changes over the last 15 years from high-performance cars to four-cylinder buzz boxes, Ferraris to Holdens and Fords. We asked Jesse Abney straight: What about Australian cars? For a couple of years we had a great run with Holdens and Fords but they've disappeared. Will we see them again?

“It ebbs and flows, man! While we'd like to please everybody there's only so much we can get done in a year. We do have a commitment to post-launch

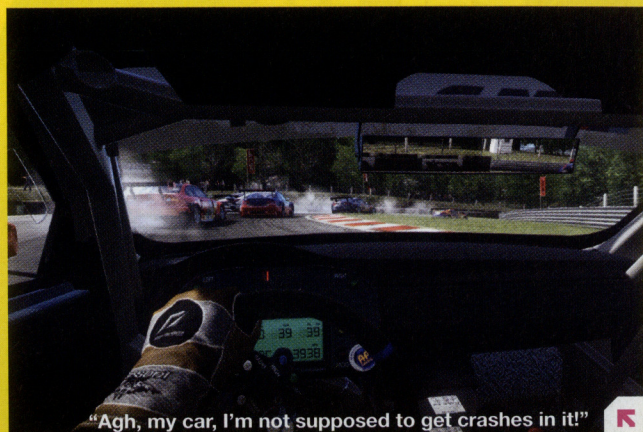
development where our licensing team continues to work with manufacturers to get approvals, our modelling team continues to work with assets to build game-ready models and the audio that goes along with them and the physics too. We now have a commitment to continue to work on throughout the year. There's always an opportunity that things will make a reappearance in games like *SHIFT*. It'd be cool to see trucks like Holden utes in there as well [laughs] and, y'know, anything's possible, that's what I'll say.”

...AND RUBBIN', SON, IS RACING

After we spoke to Jesse Abney, we pounded on EA's door and demanded they give us the keys. What we found is a game that's grown up. A smart English accent, as opposed to an American, guides you through the front end and into the *Need For Speed* world.

Career progression is as you'd expect: pick a car, win a race, earn money, upgrade or buy, though there are sub-rewards within that depending on your driving style. Style is split up into precision – sticking to the driving line, avoiding contact – and aggression – trading paint and sliding round corners. All this depends on your car or, rather, your ability to control it. Something like a Ford Focus is more likely to behave, even with stability and traction control taken off, while the BMW M3 GT2 is a monster that needs a leash.

The best way to appreciate *SHIFT* is by playing in the helmet cam (pictured). As you get closer and closer to your vehicle's top speed the world becomes a blur, and the only part of the screen that remains in focus is the track. Make a mistake and put your motor into a barrier and world turns to black and white, your avatar sucks up a lungful of air and the controller emulates his heartbeat. It's brutal, visceral and totally surprising. We dig it.



OPS: Can you tell us something about *SHIFT* that no one else knows?


JA: (laughs) Boy, I'd have to think on that for a minute! We've been gradually rolling out lots of news, and more over, man, what I can say is kinda tied by our PR guys.

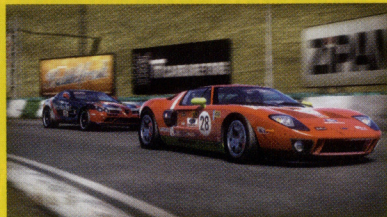
OPS: Or is there a cool little Easter egg?

JA: What I can say is some of the coolest stuff is our commitment to our post launch development. Without giving away exact details, plans for DLC are very progressive

with *SHIFT*. We saw with *Need For Speed Undercover* several steps taken to release upgraded content upgraded game modes and a number of add-ons for *Undercover* as a half-step towards our post launch commitment. What *SHIFT* is representing is going to be the next step: keeping the life of the product fresh far or long after ship. So, DLC plans – which I've just designed a blue-print for – are some pretty damn cool features and content.

This spans not only game modes but vehicles, as well as community tools, and

so given the nature of Slightly Mad's next generation engine we have a lot more ability to develop out modular interfaces for community tools like replay tools, continually add on killer WTCC and LMS styled exotic cars and continue to roll out newly crafted game modes for not only the career but certainly the online multiplayer space. So what you guys are going to see are some really cool announcements pretty soon: even though this is going to shipping mid September it's going to have life long after January of next year. 





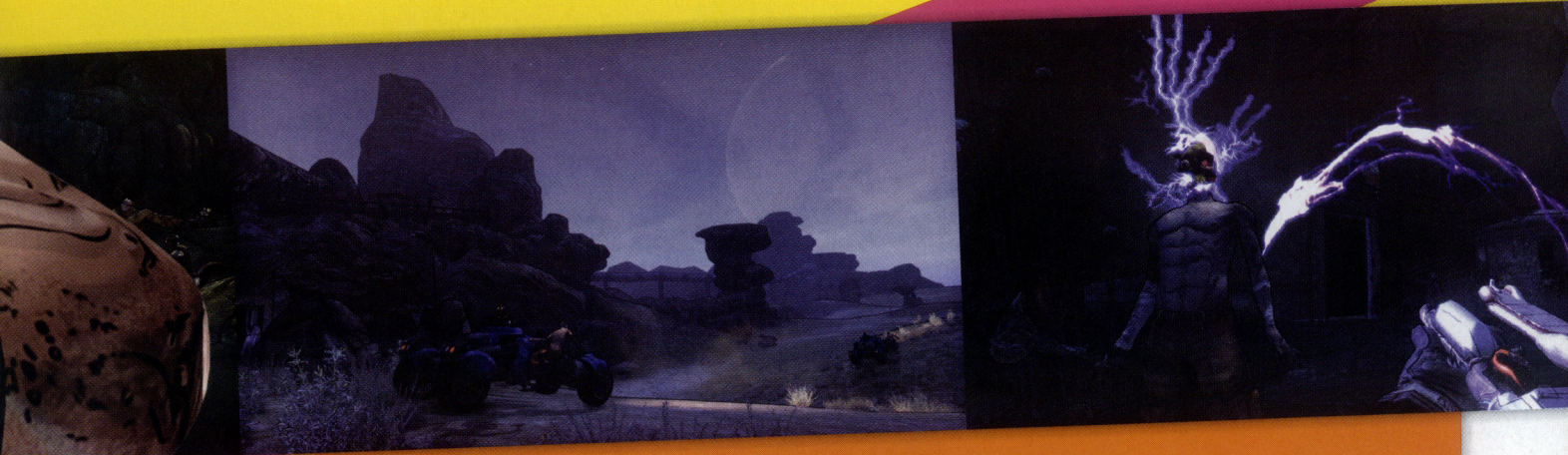
INDEPTH

Borderlands

SHOOTING FROM THE HIP

How the free-thinking, freewheeling philosophy of Gearbox has produced one of the most innovative shooters ever made.

Words: James Cottee



It was a move that surprised everyone. Gearbox, the elite Texan developer behind *Brothers in Arms*, had jettisoned the realistic graphical style of their upcoming shooter *Borderlands*. The screens from E3 showed that this sprawling, post-apocalyptic epic now sported a cel-shaded look, like *XIII*. Gone was the grimness. *Borderlands* was now a cartoon come to life.

Why such a radical change in direction? Why so late in the development cycle? And how did such a risky move ever get approved? The inception of this bolder, badder *Borderlands* lay in an enlightened management style: hiring the best possible staff, and then trusting them to do their best.

As Vice President Steve Gibson told us, the cel-shading revamp got started a whopping two years into development – the point where most dev teams would be close to calling it a day.

“Convincing the boss was one thing. Convincing the investors was another”

“The promise of the game was gigantic. You had the level designers and the coders still building up this gigantic game. Whereas the art department was actually close to wrapping up their part of the game. And they were like: ‘Well, what can we do to make the game better?’ And the feeling they were having was, ‘You know what? When we look back at our original concept, and the ideas that we had, we’re not really fully seeing those realised in the game.’”

To explain how the art team felt their original vision had been watered down, Steve used the example of those concept cars that never get beyond the motor shows. “You get those crazy-ass things that just look fantastic, right. And then, somewhere through the process, when it gets to the marketing guys, and it gets to the assembly line, and things like that, you end up with, like, a Ford Taurus.”

“So, they were like, ‘This is happening to our game! We don’t want that!’ We had all this attitude, and all these ideas, and they were just getting distilled down to the generic sci-fi fantasy merc. So they decided: ‘We’re going

to put together a little covert team, and try some concepts out.’ So they spent a couple of weeks there, just trying out new ideas.”

Yet the art team couldn’t make their new vision of *Borderlands* come to life on their own. “The renderers needed coders, and artists, and things like that, and they pulled them aside...” And when you’re good at what you do, you don’t do it for free. All of those man-hours were costing Gearbox money.

That’s fine, if you’ve got clearance.

But these guys didn’t get permission from the boss.

“And then Randy actually got wind of this. He heard this was happening...”

At this point Randy Pitchford, founder and president of Gearbox, chimed in:

“I didn’t even know! It was an insurgency!”

Steve freely acknowledged the gravity of the risk they were taking.

“This was millions of dollars. Randy here was like, ‘Clearly, I’ve got to shut this down. It’s too risky. There’s so much at stake here, we can’t do this.’ But you don’t want to crush their souls, right?”

Randy let out some evil chuckles at this point, suggesting the thought had crossed his mind.

Steve then described the dark bargain Randy struck.

“‘Okay, I know you’re up to something. I tell you what: I’m going to let you work on it for a couple more weeks, and you’ll probably discover on your own that this is too risky and we can’t do this.’ The idea was to let them down gently.”

“So they pulled in a lot more people, they put a presentation together, and Randy sees it... and can’t say no. He’s just blown away. ‘It accomplishes so many things that we really wanted to do, and you guys brought it to life’

“‘We’ve GOTTA do this!’”

Convincing the boss was one thing. Convincing the investors was another. 2K Games had already sunk millions into this project, and there was no guarantee they’d commit millions more for a fresh coat of paint.

“Fortunately enough for us, 2K was fresh off the success of *BioShock*, and they had an original art style. So we were lucky that 2K was the partner we had at the time.

“2K was like: ‘Well... YES. Do it.’”

We’re glad they did. A super-realistic art style would have clashed horribly with the over-the-top tone of the action, the

outrageous voice acting, the overpowered sci-fi weapons, the swearing and screaming, and the giant space monsters. This is as far removed from a WWII shooter as you can imagine.

“You can see, if you look at the earlier presentations of the game, it felt a little more serious. The fun was reined in, because it didn’t feel possible with the art.

“Now what this art style has enabled us to do is what everybody wanted originally: over the top FUN. Now we can actually do that, and not worry about — ‘Does this look right in the world?’ With this art style, EVERYTHING looks right in this world. Do whatever you want, and it just looks right.

“The end result is that we got a better game.”

But just what kind of a game is it? To explain the inspiration behind this odd fusion of shooter and RPG, we turned to Randy himself.

“It’s very simple what we wanted to do. We wanted to take our core, shooter gameplay, where the skill is the fun... the skill of moving, and aiming, and shooting, and the feedback you get from that is the fun, and we wanted to blend that with the compulsion we feel from RPGs, where the fun is in collecting loot, and leveling up, and getting more powerful, and developing your skills, and customising your character. We wanted to combine those things, and that was the simple premise that started us down this path.

“So it started from a design point of view. As we dived into that, then we layered in the story and the style concepts that supported the design. But that was the bet we made. To blend those things together, and see if we could do it. And it’s a pretty good bet.”

To help explain the appeal of RPG grinding, Randy cited the deceptive simplicity of the hit PC series *Diablo*. “You had one interface. You had a mouse pointer, and you had icons. So the skill to play the game was the same skill that you used to launch the application. You put the cursor on the icon, and you click it.


“It’s a very simple skill. No skill, actually.”

“But there’s a choice. There’s a lot of decisions to make. Do I want a battleaxe, or a sword? Do I want this sword, or that sword? This sword swings faster, but that one does more damage. So there’s a lot of choice. ➔

“It’s just fun to move and shoot... I’ve been making those kinds of games for my entire career”

RANDY PITCHFORD

HANDS-ON IMPRESSIONS

In our brief time with *Borderlands*, we learned that not only can *Killzone*-style shooting action and *Diablo*-style RPG-grinding be combined, the two go together surprisingly well. Every action carries a risk, yet brings positive reinforcement. Shooting dead, say, an eight-foot circus freak, or a shotgun-toting midget, will disgorge huge piles of loot that glow with an alluring blue; holding  makes all that ammo and cash fly off the ground straight into your inventory.

Bonus text is triggered with every connecting hit, and leveling up will slam the words LEVEL UP in skewed, jumbo letters across the screen, like a giant rubber stamp. This is not a subtle game. It is intense, certainly, and deep – the expertise behind *Brothers in Arms* is clearly on display. But *Borderlands* doesn’t take itself particularly seriously. If you seek the grim/dark stylings of *Killzone 2*, look elsewhere.

There's also a lot of discovery. Uncovering the black in the world, you know? Digging deep into the environment and finding interesting weapons, better weapons. There's a lot of discovery, and the growth from that." Better weapons, better skills, and the incentive to keep coming back for more as your capabilities grow.

"So even though there's no skill from a tactile point of view, there's a lot of decisions, there's a lot of growth, and choice, and discovery. There's a lot of compelling stuff there. It almost becomes a compulsion. It hooked me, and it hooked a lot of people."

Likewise, the best shooters can be incredibly deep in some respects, yet shallow in others. The leading FPS on 360, Randy points out, doesn't feature any stat-based skill progression.

"The Master Chief at the end of *Halo* is identical to the

Master Chief at the beginning of *Halo*. The fun of that game is not about the compulsion of growth, or choice so much. There's a little bit of discovery in there, but it's certainly not growth. The fun is in the skill test."

Randy loves his shooters – at this point he was really getting into it.

"It's just fun to move and shoot, and it feels GOOD. There's just something RAW about, like, okay, 'I'm gonna dodge,' and go 'aaaghh, cool,' and I blew the guy up. I love that. I've been making those kinds of games for my entire career.

"I love that kind of stuff."

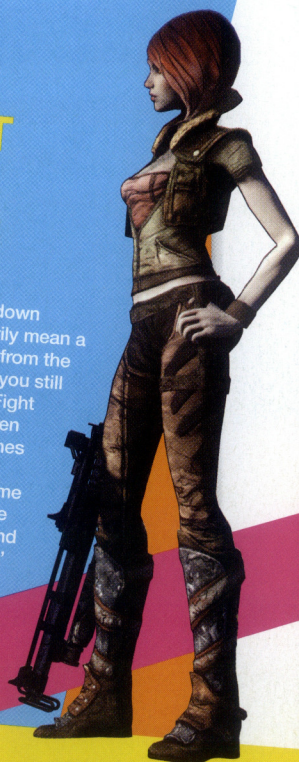
Randy soon regained his composure.

"But at the end of the day, the Master Chief's the same at the end as he was at the beginning.

"So the bet is: Can we layer those things together? Can we take a shooter and can we layer in the compulsion of *Diablo* – of loot, of quests, of

FIGHT FOR YOUR LIFE

Getting gunned down doesn't necessarily mean a long march back from the re-spawn point – you still get a chance to 'Fight For Your Life'. When this message flashes up in huge letters, you'll have a set time to kill just one more enemy. Succeed and your 'Second Wind' kicks in.



“Can we take a shooter and can we layer in the compulsion of *Diablo* – of loot, of quests, of discovery, of choice, of skills and character development... Can we layer that stuff on top of *Halo*? And can we make it fun? That was the bet”

RANDY PITCHFORD

discovery, of choice, of skills and character development...

"Can we layer that stuff on top of *Halo*? And can we make it fun? That was the bet."

So how does that work in practice? Well, for instance, when you're blasting away at some kind of alien spider monster, you don't just see the sparks from your bullets connecting; you also see little numbers rising through the air to show how much damage you're doing.

That damage is determined purely by player choice.

"There's no dice-rolling under the hood. Your skill that determined whether or not you hit the target. When you hit it, it's telling you what's happening; how much damage you're doing. And the damage that you're doing is based on the weapon you're using, the skills you've got, that you've developed, what level you are, what level the enemy is, what equipment the enemy has... But given all that, there's no dice roll that decides 'did he hit or not?'"

This fact alone sets *Borderlands* apart from the likes of *Fallout 3*.

"There is some tactics to that, because it tells you how you're doing. If you're shooting at something, and you're seeing like '1... 1...', it's like, 'Okay... clearly I'm using the wrong tool for the job here.' Or maybe: 'I'm not prepared for this fight.' Meanwhile, if you shoot a guy in a squishy spot, and it says CRITICAL and a huge amount of damage comes out, and it's like, sweet. You did that well."

As Randy told us more about the horrifying beasts that prowl the surface of planet Pandora, the game started to sound eerily familiar to a certain PSP smash-hit. "You'll find as you play the game more, that the creatures have weaknesses, and sometimes in their animations or behaviors they expose those weaknesses. And so there's a skill and tactics to looking for opportunities there."

So we asked, point blank: Had he played *Monster Hunter*? ➔

“We want lots of shotguns, we want lots of rocket launchers”

STEVE GIBSON

“Little bit. [awkward pause] No, I'm thinking of *Monster Rancher*.

“My mistake.”

Borderlands is a showcase for radical ideas. Take the randomisation of weapon types; Steve explained to us that this was implemented as a simple measure to prevent the game from getting boring. How could it get boring if you never fire the same gun twice?

“The design decision when you're building a shooter is, we need to build a shotgun, right? I'll look at, say, the *Doom* shotgun, which is pretty cool, or the *Half-Life* shotgun... there's all these different games, and you're always down to: ‘How do we make our shotgun good?’”

The first one they came up with worked, but lacked a certain razzmatazz. “We were not enjoying it.” Then the thought occurred to them that in an ideal world, you'd have more than one shotgun. You'd have stacks of them.

“We want lots of shotguns, we want lots of rocket launchers. We have all these choices, and we want people to enjoy those choices. That's one of our creeds: choice is a big part of the game. So why not give people those choices? But, then the challenge is, clearly, we cannot design 100 rocket launchers, 100 shotguns, or anything like that.”

The manpower simply didn't exist. “So the next logical choice is, we need to design an AI that can make this happen for us. So what we did was we created this AI system called Gearbuilder. It takes all these different shotgun barrels and clips, and revolvers, and all those possibilities, and throws them into a mixture, and it gives us out all the possibilities.”

The results have been legendary. There are sawn-off shotguns, long-range shotguns, shotguns with scopes, and

so forth. But Gearbuilder has also spawned firearms no-one could have predicted.

“We've seen a shotgun that fires rockets. And the description actually is: ‘Holy Shit! It shoots rockets!’ That's what it [says on screen] when you get it.

“We started out with the promise of half a million guns. Now we're into millions upon millions, as we've evolved the system, and grown it, and realised just how crazy and amazing we can make it.” They stopped counting ages ago. What they can quantify is the impact Gearbuilder has had on the game.

“It makes it fun for us to demonstrate. Because, honestly? If some guy picked up the same pistol over and over, after the hundredth demo, I'd be pretty bored. But now we see something new every single time.”

But wait – there's more. This technology also randomises the makeup and behaviour of the enemies you'll face.

“There's lots of possibilities. You can have giant Spider Ants with different attack modes, when they'll roll up into a ball and charge at you, or you'll have elemental effects on them, jumping effects... all the possibilities that these guys can combine.” Even scripted encounters where you face the ‘same’ batch of enemies are unpredictable by design. “They're going to be all different every time.”

“It makes it fun for us.”


Speaking of fun, no discussion of *Borderlands* would be complete without touching on the Claptrap, a smart-alec cross between WALL-E,

Johnny Cab, and every other cute little droid to ever send you on a fetch quest. He's brilliant. He's adorable. And as Randy told us, he's yet another key feature thrown in because the designers felt like it.

“At first, he wasn't even in the game. He was just sort of a mascot at Gearbox, and we had concept art of him hanging around the office. He had nothing to do with the game. He was just so cool, like, ‘Hey, we gotta put him in there!’”

As the Claptrap trundles along, guiding you around the hub town of Fyrestone, he chirps happily to himself, sounding exactly like that cartoon typewriter on Sesame Street: ‘Doo dee doo dee doo de doo!’ Randy honestly couldn't tell us if that was a direct reference. “That's a new one!”

After our brief time with *Borderlands*, Randy, and Steve, we were convinced that all their impulsive, last-minute choices were for the best. These iterative improvements have taken what might have been just another shooter, and turned it into something extraordinary.

These guys shoot from the hip – so when they mentioned that Gearbox staff often spend their lunch breaks at a nearby firing range, it wasn't a huge surprise. 

NETHACK 4 EVER

When the topic turned to old-school dungeon crawlers like *Diablo* and *Rogue*, Gearbox head Randy Pitchford firmly established his RPG street cred: “I've probably spent more hours with *Nethack* than any other thing... ever. “Probably. I dunno.”



SKAG PARTY

The monsters in *Borderlands* truly are hideous. Take the low-level annoyances called Skags. Skags are sort of what dogs might look like on another planet, if they didn't so much have scales, and they didn't so much have mouths as fang-lined vertical gashes that bisect their heads, opening like toxic flowers to shoot forth multiple whip-like tongue stingers. These horrifying wretches attack without mercy in packs of six or more, and appear to be the **WEAKEST** enemies in the game.

“When they mentioned that Gearbox staff often **spend their lunch breaks at a nearby firing range**, it wasn't a huge surprise”



24 September '09



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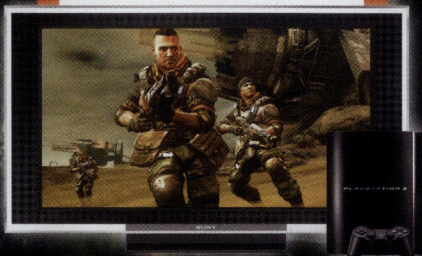
“Rocksteady has followed up its work on the **thoroughly excellent but underappreciated** *Urban Chaos: Riot Response* with total aplomb.”

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

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We choose to review our games on a super-slick Full HD 1080p 40" Bravia X-series for the best picture possible. This sucker melts eyeballs!



REVIEW RATING

PlayStation
GOLD AWARD

10 Incredible: Perfection is relative and elusive, and no game will ever be perfect. Our 10 doesn't mean a game is flawless, it means a game has done everything, it set out to do in an amazing fashion and thus it deserves our highest possible praise.

PlayStation
SILVER AWARD

9 Excellent: An outstanding game, either limited by its scope, sequel status (and lack of improvement) or a few minor blemishes from being a 10. Likely one of the very best in its genre, a 9 comes with high praise.

PlayStation
BRONZE AWARD

8 Great: Still well ahead of the pack in most departments, despite a few issues here and there. Thoroughly recommended.

7 Good: A robust package that does a solid job despite a bunch of moderate problems. Enjoyable in parts, just not fantastic overall.

6 Decent: This game will have some noticeable flaws that may make it hard to recommend to those who aren't fans of the genre, but it will do more right than it does wrong. Just.

5 Mediocre: A conceded pass, if you know what we mean. Half okay, but half-busted. Might scrape by for fans, but few will want to play a game that half sucks.

4 Poor: Anything below 5, strictly speaking, is a fail – but there are degrees of 'bad' just as there are degrees of 'good'. A 4 is unrefined, partially broken and poorly designed.

3 Very disappointing: Things start to go very wrong here – fundamentally flawed in many ways, boring and close to pointless.

2 Terrible: Virtually nothing good here at all, and definitely not worth the effort of removing the wrapper.

1 The worst: Reserved for the very worst gaming could ever offer. A broken, offensive mess without a single redeeming quality.

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Same Bat time, Same Bat Channel

Batman: the gravel-voiced, cowl-clad Dark Knight, has never really been given a decent game to call his own – certainly not on the PS3. Oh sure, he was a character in the halfway decent PS2 title, *Justice League Heroes* – and he'll pop up in movie tie-ins – but it's as if no one's seen the potential of the mighty bat.

The last halfway decent Bats game we remember playing is *Batman: The Movie* for the Commodore 64 and, in retrospect, it was probably shit.

We think the reason for Batman not spurting out little franchise winged babies like a uterus cannon (*LEGO Batman* notwithstanding) is that his stories tend to be a little darker than, say, Spider-Man or even Hulk: both of whom have had non-movie related games based on them.

An idea that seemed obvious was 'GTA: Gotham'. Bats hoons around in the Batmobile choosing to fight muggers, crooks and super villains.

Great idea, but the project is huge with no guarantee it would work. And it didn't. Ask Pandemic Studios in Brisbane.

No, what a solid Batman game needed was a location that didn't encompass all of Gotham, but gave the title the slightly crime-

stinky odour of the Bats' universe.

What better place than Arkham Asylum?

Arkham Asylum is housed on the coast of Gotham. It's not your average big house. Sure there's the unwanted sex and toothbrushes sharpened into shivs that we've come to expect from modern correctional institutions, but it also holds the worst of the worst. Batman's most heinous villains.

The Joker? Yes sir.

Scarecrow? Right to your left.

Poison Ivy? Just follow the vines. The idea being that this extreme location, while relatively small, is full of funky characters, hidden bonuses and even a mini Bat Cave! Batman made it there... just in case.

Batman: Arkham Asylum begins with an extremely pretty sequence where Batman drives the Batmobile at scrote-shrinkingly fast speeds through Gotham.

Joker bound and gagged, the clown prince of evil ready to be dropped back in the pokey so Batman can bugger off to brood atop a gargoye or similar.

Of course Batman knows the Joker's as sly as a family of unusually sly foxes bound together with ookie straps and asked to enter the "Sly Quadruped Challenge 2009".

Very sly, in other words.

In fact, in between his gibbering it seems like The Joker let himself get taken to Arkham awfully easily...

...then BAM! The trap is sprung and the lunatics are running the asylum. The Joker and Harley Quinn (who looks sexy as hell) are

experimenting with the likes of Bane and the venom that makes him so, you know, Bane-like. Plus Doctor Crane (aka The Scarecrow) is on the loose as well as some other big baddies we'll talk about in a little while.

The point is: you've fallen into a trap. A trap that's brimming with insane, tough thugs and have to stop whatever new nutty nefarious scheme ol' green hair's got cooked up.

So Bats finds himself armed with nothing but a grapple hook and a limitless supply of one throw batterangs (later on you can throw up to three at a time). He also has Detective Mode. A quick press of **LB** and suddenly you're seeing through walls and objects you can pick up are highlighted.

Also, if you want to trail someone – say someone who smokes – you can take a sample of the tobacco and follow the trail it leaves. The most useful aspect of Detective Mode, however, is the X-ray vision. As you creep like a shadow in the dark from one room to the next, Detective mode will analyse the contents of the room. There could be five hostiles unarmed and two armed. Now we get to the bit of Batman that makes this such a kick arse title.

Leaving the gun-toting baddies aside for a second let's talk hand-to-hand combat. You know how in *MGS4*, and indeed a few of the others, CQC was a much touted and rarely used martial arts technique. Well, forget that because the punchy/kicky combat in *Arkham Asylum* is breathtaking. Say you're facing 10 thugs. They'll circle you. Now you can just start cracking skulls, but it's better to wait for

PlayStation®
Official Magazine - Australia

BRONZE
AWARD

“The last halfway decent Bats game we remember playing is **Batman: The Movie** for the Commodore 64”

them to throw the first punch. You can tell this is about to happen because jagged white lines appear above their heads. You counter the blow with **A** and then, with a mix of **D**, **C**, **X** and **A** some more you can pull off some of the most insanely creative and awesome to watch fight moves ever. The problem is the combos are broken if you get hit or you wait too long before belting someone. Still, after smacking a guy behind you with your elbow, sweeping his leg and knocking him out with a mighty fist to the face, followed by batarangs to other thug's mugs and then becoming a jumping/kicking/punching cyclone of power – where the last villain is always shown going down in glorious close-up slow-mo – you won't be able to help murmuring a barely audible 'wow'.

You can upgrade your skills, too. Unblockable take-down moves, throws, super-fast jumps, using your grapple gun to knock people off their feet, exploding mines, claw-shooter attacks or using explosive foam as proximity mines or detonable weapons – you'll find Batman's initially very light utility belt is brimming by the end of the game.

Comparisons between *Arkham Asylum* and *Metal Gear Solid* are obvious. Both games look pretty amazing (although *MGS4* is the winner there) and both games contain a lot of stealth and numerous gadgets.

Now while *MGS4* is an amazing feat of game making, it has to be said the Batman stealth is streamlined and easier to get a →

A SPOILERY BOX OUT

A lot of the fact we don't have many villains could be forgiven if the fights were cool. Bane's battle is sweet, but then other folks with venom copy his moves. Poison Ivy fights from a giant plant and the rest... well, you'll see. The one fight we thought we could depend on was a fisty/punchy/kicky battle with The Joker. Possibly atop the roof of Arkham with lightning flashing in the background. A real bruiser of a match where both fighters end up battered and bleeding, but Bat triumphant. No. No, in fact the end fight is kind of stupid. Oh well, maybe next time.



INFO

GENRE: ACTION
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO
BANDAI PARTNERS
DEVELOPER: ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS
PLAYERS: 1
PRICE: \$109.95

YOU'RE JOKING

As yet we have not played as The Joker. We have unlocked armoured Batman (who kicks a lot of arse in the Challenge Rooms) but we'll get back to you when The Joker is released.

MORE VILLAINS, PLEASE

Why not more villains, damn it? After all, we also have housed in the Asylum: The Riddler (who is never seen), Mr. Freeze (we see his cell), Hush, Two-Face, Catwoman, Firefly, Ratcatcher, Black Mask, Great White Shark, Clayface, Calendar Man and The Ventriloquist (admittedly, we get to see the latter).



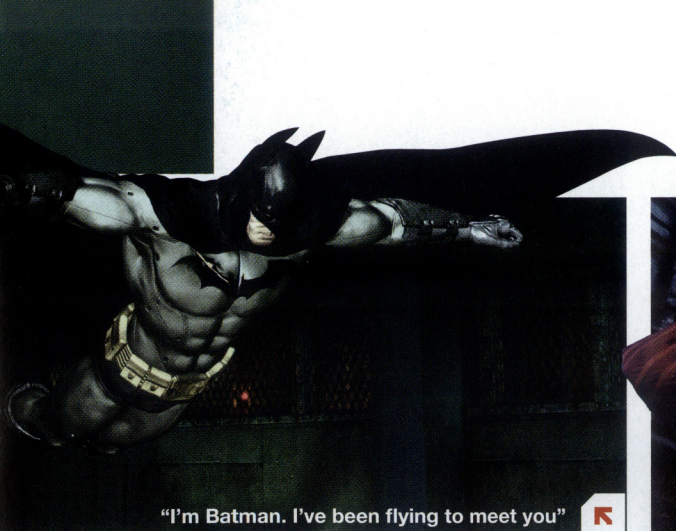
WORSE THAN **BETTER THAN**
INFAMOUS | PROTOTYPE



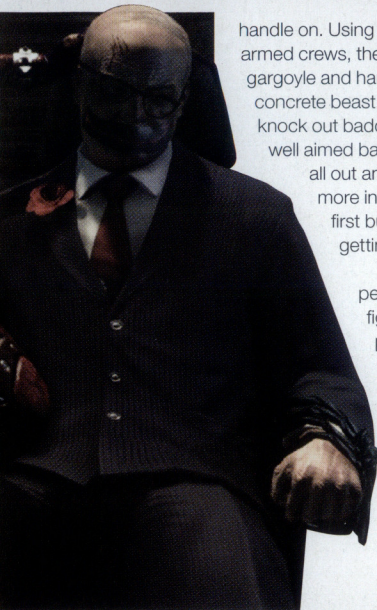
The Arkham Fun Run was always popular



"Damn, these undies are just terrible for my batawang"



"I'm Batman. I've been flying to meet you"



handle on. Using gadgets you'll want to separate armed crews, then swoop down from a gargoyle and hang them upside down from the concrete beast. You can also set charges and knock out baddies with rubble, stun them with well aimed batarangs and then knock them all out and so on. The stealth feels a lot more intuitive than *MGS4*. It's tough at first but persevere – you'll soon be getting upgrades.

You'll do this mainly by performing tasks. Winning a fight will give you upgrade points, finding Riddler trophies (over two hundred of which have been hidden around



The Joker: huge *CSI: Miami* fan (YEEEEEEEEEEEEAAAAHHHHHHH!!!)

the prison and its grounds), also solving the Riddler's Riddles. He gives you a clue about "reflecting", you find a mirror, scan it and solve the riddle. Big upgrades. Also killing the Joker's snapping teeth around the place, beating bosses or making it to new areas – all will give you a chance to upgrade – but make sure you think about the choices. Play to your strengths.

"This game has been crafted with obvious love and care... It's just so rich"



"No, no gum – I don't know why you're complain-OOOFF!"



Rule #1: Never smile at a crocodile

Batman: Arkham Asylum is easily, like really easily, the best Batman game in existence. The location, the clever puzzles, the amazing combat – seriously, sometimes the grimy locations you fight the thugs in look like moving airbrushed artwork from the likes of Steve Bisley.

Combine that with a plot that actually makes sense and a genuine sense of mood and atmosphere. The sequence where you have to enter Killer Croc's lair is bloody terrifying. Sometimes it takes you a moment to work out you're hallucinating because of Scarecrow gas, so when things start getting weird... just go with it.

The game has been crafted with obvious love and care. Rocksteady has followed up its work on the thoroughly excellent but underappreciated *Urban Chaos: Riot Response* with total aplomb. It's just so rich. Not only do you get info about the foes you have, you can unlock bios for pretty much all of Batman's other enemies. Sometimes you can hear them interviewed by shrinks. Plus there's nice touches like finding Clayface's cell and he keeps changing form, asking you to let him out. Very cool. By about the three-quarter mark you'll have multiple batarangs, upgraded armour, a bat claw and a zip line – plus doors that appeared locked for most of the game can now be hacked. The level design is terrific, as well as the characters, animation and cut

scenes. To be honest we'd like to end the review there, but there are a few quibbles worth mentioning.

Despite giving the gamer multiple Challenge Rooms, loads of unlockables including foes as collectible figurines, despite all the cool plot twists and chunky, tooth-cracking combat... it probably could've been a bit longer. You could finish the game in 10 hours (eight if you just dash from goal to goal) but even taking your sweet time it's not going to last you more than 15 hours. Not overly short by today's standards, but we couldn't help feeling like *Arkham Asylum* didn't truly capitalise on its wonderfully unique location. There are a number of super villains you never lay eyes on, let alone a finger, for instance. Some will certainly see it as somewhat of a missed opportunity, particularly considering the strength of Batman's rogue's gallery and the fact that we kind of expected to come across them inside *Arkham Asylum*. If you were going to put all Batman's baddies in one spot, this would've been the place to do it. To be fair to an otherwise fantastic title, we do have to review the game we're given, not the game we'd have liked it to have been.

Still, *Batman: Arkham Asylum* is one of the best games this year. Some of the boss fights are a bit clichéd but there's so much good stuff here it's impossible you'll have a bad time. Finally the Dark Knight gets a shit hot game. Now about that 'GTA: Gotham' idea...

Anthony O'Connor

FINAL SAY:



- The most authentic, dark and compelling Batman game ever
- The combat engine is a revelation - hand-to-hand hero beat downs



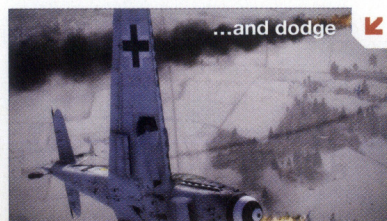
- There are too few big baddies and none of them are terribly satisfying to fight
- Quite simply it's just too short, even with the Challenge Rooms

VERDICT: *Batman: Arkham Asylum* really delivers the goods. An epic Bat story with some amazing Bat touches. Bat-tacular.

8

THAT'S SUPER!

It's a good time for superhero games. The upcoming *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance 2* – loosely based on the Civil War story line – is the one we reckon will be the next big winner.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: BIRDS OF PREY

On a wing and a prayer in the air up there

Nearly 70 years on, the life of a World War II pilot seems deceptively simple. You spent a good deal of time in the air, giving Fritz what-for, shouting tally-ho and trying to avoid the chop. You spent the rest of time on the ground badgering mechanics to paint swastikas on your kite and scooting out to the nearest village to have sex with other people's wives. It's a completely unfair appraisal of RAF life, and one that we very likely just made up. Still, we always picture pilots as dashing sorts of blokes who, when they aren't murdering Nazis at 10,000 feet, aren't adverse to giving the fairer sex something to hang their

towels on. It makes sense that the exploits of these men have been adapted into videogame form for the last two decades, and we don't think it's ever been done better than it has in *IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey*.

Birds of Prey is all about scale, and that scale is large. *Birds of Prey* features six main theatres representing the main airborne stoushes of WWII; the Battle of Britain, Stalingrad, Sicily, Korsun, the Battle of the Bulge and the Battle of Berlin. Each of these mini campaigns is set on large and exceedingly details maps. Our favourite is probably the first, the English countryside around Dover. The ground is a green quilt of green pastures, patches of trees, rolling hills, country lanes, small villages, grass airstrips and makeshift military bases, all the way to the white cliffs – which drop away into the English Channel. It's spectacular, and it stands up to low-level inspection far better than any other flight game we've ever seen.

It plays well too. On the arcade setting the controls themselves don't take long to

master, which is nice. The left stick controls pitch and roll and the right thumbstick controls yaw and throttle. There's a cockpit view for the dedicated, some helpful target acquisition and aiming assistance for the less dedicated and plenty of goals to complete. One feature we particularly liked is the ability to continue after your main mission objectives are dusted in order to knock down a few more planes, or manually land back at base. It'd be nice if the 'victory music' didn't constantly loop at this point however.

Working in the unison with the overall above-average level of quality are the tiny details that really begin to add up and stop you in your tracks. The damage modelling, for instance, is enormously impressive. Enemy slugs and flak will rend gaping holes in your plane, some so large you can see straight through them. Control surfaces can be shot away and landing gear can collapse under rough landings. Mid-air collisions can and will shear off a wingtip, or an entire wing, and send you spinning towards the ground. →



INFO

GENRE: FLIGHT
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: AIE
DEVELOPER: GAIJIN
ENTERTAINMENT
PLAYERS: 1-16
PRICE: \$99.95



WORSE THAN BEING MICHAEL CAINE | **BETTER THAN** TOM CLANCY'S HAWK

"We must get back to Stuttgart in time to see Kraftwerk"

▶ The Mustang: so good they named a horse after it



THE NAME GAME

It's tough to fathom why 505 Games stuck with the achingly unmarketable moniker *IL-2 Sturmovik* for the franchise's console debut. We know the *IL-2* series is highly revered on PC, albeit mainly by men who haven't had a shave since Germany was two countries (or Czechoslovakia was one). We know this, we do. We've got no reason to doubt that its reputation is deserved, but how relevant it is to the console crowd is debatable. We wonder if they would've been better served going with something... cooler. There's a reason *Gran Turismo* isn't called 'Leyland P76: Steeds of Speed' – it's clunky, alienating and silly. We're fairly certain that unless you're a diehard aviation enthusiast, or are biomechanically hardwired into Wikipedia, you wouldn't know what a *IL-2 Sturmovik* was if it ditched itself in your morning *Coco Pops* and the pilot made off with your sister.



▶ The Spitfire: As British as cucumber sandwiches

“We always picture pilots as dashing sorts of blokes who... aren't adverse to giving the fairer sex **something to hang their towels on**”

IN REVIEW

IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey

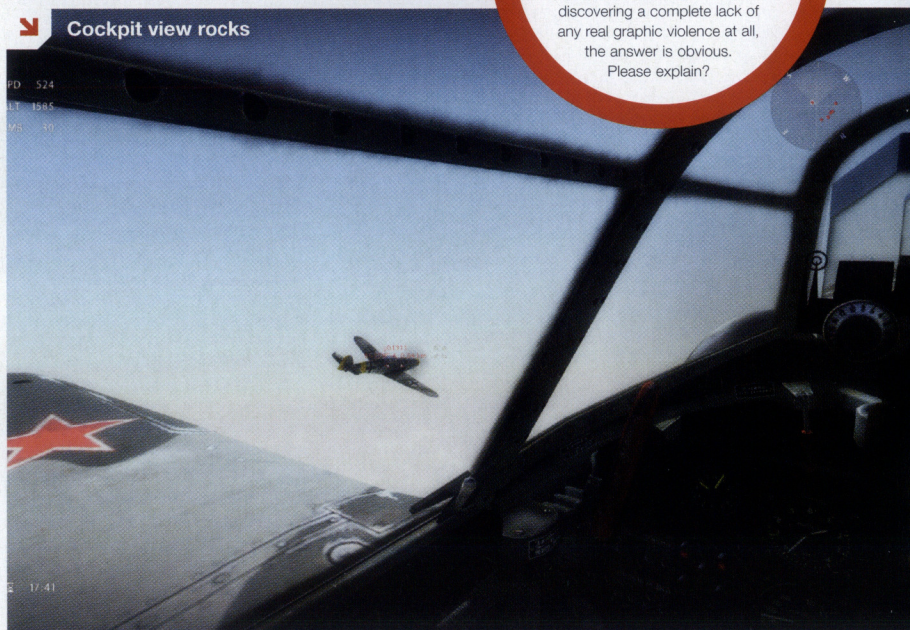
“Smoking shell casings tumble from your trailing edges”

MA15+? HUH?

IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey is rated PG in New Zealand, but in Australia it's rated MA15+. Somebody got this one wrong and, after discovering a complete lack of any real graphic violence at all, the answer is obvious. Please explain?

Cockpit view rocks

PD 524
L1 1585
MS 30



Messerschmitt: Hard to shoot down, harder to spell

Tuck in behind an enemy plane spewing out thick black smoke and your screen will be flecked with spots of oil. Remain engulfed in the smoke, however, and your whole screen will quickly be smeared in sludge leaving you flying blind until it fades away. Smoking shell casings tumble from your trailing edges as you hammer down the trigger, and the sky is a wicked criss-cross of vapour trails and streaking bullets. The whole project has been executed with incredible flair and precision. It's a whale-sized effort from Moscow-based Gaijin Entertainment that's quite stunning whether you're a planespotter or not.

Problems?

The sheer amount of remarkable detail in each of the huge maps has come at a cost – because there aren't many of them. Fewer environments is a concession we'll happily accept in order for them to look as spectacular as they do, but we'd be lying if we said it didn't eventually get a little samey zipping over the same landscapes four or five missions in a row.

Likewise, there are fewer flyable planes than, say *Blazing Angels* – but the models in *Birds of Prey* are far more detailed. Again, still the right decision. Quality over quantity. Maybe a little cheap DLC could bolster the slightly spartan hangar though.

The more or less instant respawning takes away some of the urgency from the missions themselves – but you can shut them off, which makes things tenser. The fully-fledged

simulation mode is bewilderingly difficult and will see very little use, but its inclusion does mark *Birds of Prey* as a flight game for a very wide audience (from the very casual, to the very... lonely).

All in all, most of the other blanks in *Birds of Prey's* ammo belt are simply limitations inherent in the genre. Flight games really are simple shooting galleries, and thus they start to age somewhat quite quickly. *Birds of Prey* isn't immune from this, but it's also quite short. Multiplayer should help plenty here, and we're dying to check it out post-release, but we would've liked to have seen some kind of mission generator for more singleplayer yucks.

Also, ground bashing is always more boring than dogfighting in any flight game, and *Birds of Prey* is no exception. Shredding up gun batteries and ships is significantly less fun than tangling with airborne bandits, and the game doesn't do too much to convince you otherwise.

Small criticisms aside, there really isn't a lot else Gaijin could've done better here. *IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey* is easily the best-looking flight game on PS3, and it's certainly

the best playing. A fantastic sense of speed (especially in cockpit view at treetop height), intense and visceral aerial action, great sound and terrific attention to detail culminate in an extremely good game that's far less stuffy than you'd have ever expected. **— Luke Reilly**

FINAL SAY:



- Head-turning attention to detail
- Fun and accessible sky-blasting



- Longevity will be an issue
- Unfriendly title at odds with how good the game is

VERDICT: Far and away the best flight game we've played - a huge surprise and thoroughly recommended.

8



FREE to join
to play

Are You an AFL Guru?

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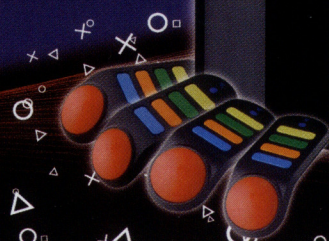


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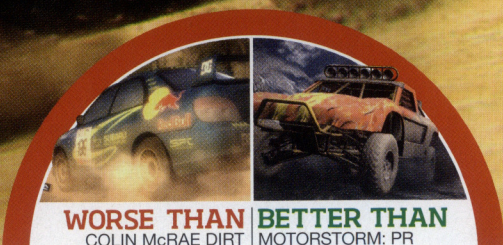


PLAYSTATION 3



INFO

GENRE: RACING
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO
BANDAI PARTNERS
DEVELOPER: CODEMASTERS
PLAYERS: 1-8
PRICE: \$109.95



WORSE THAN COLIN McRAE DIRT **BETTER THAN** MOTORSTORM: PR



The DC Shoes logo is everywhere



COLIN McRAE: DIRT 2

The Dirtying...

Ignore the implications that come with the name Colin McRae and his iconic Subaru Impreza rally car: *DiRT 2* is an extreme sports game. You just don't know it yet.

The game begins with a phone call from Travis Pastrana, welcoming you to the world of *DiRT 2*. He mentions the late Colin McRae and gives you his car, a No Fear branded Impreza, which he drove in the X Games and you're urged to "do the man proud". From there it's in to your trailer, the main hub, to fill out the requisite name and nationality form. It's from this point you quickly realise things are set to 'maximum gnarly extreme'. We were trying to pick a suitable nickname that we'd be known as through the game, and taking our time with it. Pastrana, however, insisted "C'mon dude, we got a party to go to!"

Presented on a map inside the trailer is the game's crux, the DIRT tour, a loose championship of events that can be tackled in any order you wish depending on your experience level and is represented on a map

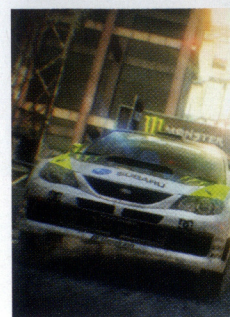
of the world. Like *DiRT*, the sequel provides a variety of disciplines to race in, like Rally, Rallycross, Raid and with a few other events thrown in as a diversion. Gone completely from the series is an event in one country, as you'll be flying all over the globe to compete in races.

On your travels you'll meet X Games personalities, both fictitious and real. Ken Block, Tanner Foust and Pastrana feature heavily (all real), as does Katie Justice and Jayde Taylor (fictitious), and each will 'host' an event, either by themselves or with another extreme dude. As we chose a Malaysian Rally, Pastrana told us he's "heading to Malaysia for some hot jungle action". Puh-lease.

London's Battersea Rallycross is the first event on the Tour and browsing the roster of cars available yields some surprises. Sure, you can choose the totally capable No Fear Group N Impreza, or the STi Impreza, or the other Impreza on the same list, or even one of the two Mitsubishi Evos. Perhaps you'd like to hit the Rallycross with a Nissan 350Z? Or the

Pontiac Solstice? How's about the BMW Z4 M Coupe? Really? Truly. Gone are Citroens, Fiats, Fords and Skodas, cars with any sort of rallying cred. Each vehicle can be used in multiple types of events provided you buy a 'pack' to make them fit. It means that you can pick a car and keep using it, though considering there are roughly five or six cars that you'd seriously consider using off road, this isn't as restricting as it sounds.

It's a hard game to take seriously as it truly promotes style over substance, which is a shame as the race experience is thoroughly exciting. Cars are beautifully modeled and come apart spectacularly if you clip them on a bit of scenery at high speed. Bonnets and bumpers are easily reeled off, crumbling and bending fences and walls dramatically. Engine noises and other sound effects are at the high level you'd expect, and Codemasters has done well to make driving loads of fun, refining the original's handling. Environments, too, are breathtaking to drive through and the difficulty



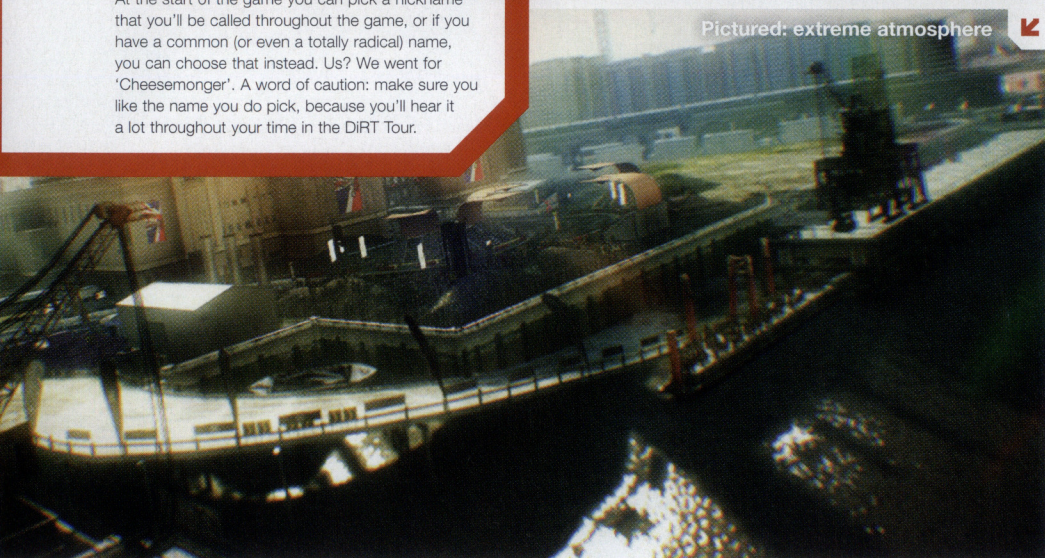


“Your rewards... are, dashboard toys and windshield ornaments”



CHEESEMONGER

At the start of the game you can pick a nickname that you'll be called throughout the game, or if you have a common (or even a totally radical) name, you can choose that instead. Us? We went for 'Cheesemonger'. A word of caution: make sure you like the name you do pick, because you'll hear it a lot throughout your time in the DIRT Tour.



Pictured: extreme atmosphere



level ramps up nicely as the game progresses. Even though it's a very forgiving game, *GRID*'s flashback system returns, for better or worse. Though your default Scottish co-driver speaks in *Sega Rally*-ese – easy left, into medium right over crest – he can be altered to be technical, however if you can't decipher “100, four left into hairpin right don't cut,” you're probably best leaving it at the default.

All these positive points are diluted by a litany of annoying and odious frivolities. Competitors love to chat during a race, either trash-talking or offering compliments

throughout. Each time you cross the finish line and place on the podium, fireworks erupt from the side of the track and confetti falls as the results table comes up, even after a rally which, according to Jayde Taylor, is “the purest form of off-road racing”. Your rewards, apart from cash, are couldn't-care-less liveries and, incredibly, dashboard toys and windshield ornaments. Yep, guess we “just unlocked some pretty sweet stuff.”

Gone, also, is the more detailed set-up. Settings for suspension, brake bias, gear ratio, etc. are defined only by ‘low to high’ or ‘front



“Last to the bourbon gets the dregs!”

to rear’ with five selectable stages in between. Granted, it cuts out a lot of confusion, though the option to delve into something more technical would've been appreciated. *DIRT* fans who have driven the original's tracks to death and know how to tweak a car setup will feel dumbed down here.

That pretty much describes the game: dumbed down. Despite Pastrana, Block and Foust all being legitimate X Games drivers, their credibility and instruction can't be taken seriously compared to someone like McRae. Their sound-bites before events, like “people here know how to party”, don't add anything to the race. Ultimately, underneath the nu-metal tunes, radical attitude and try-hard party atmosphere lies a great game that, like a tibia at an extreme-sports event, is fractured into a thousand pieces. A shame. **Paul Taylor**

FINAL SAY:

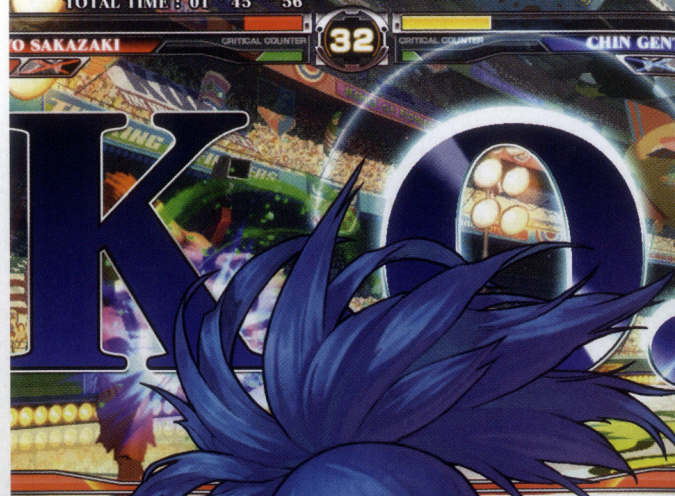
- Spectacular graphics
- Great handling
- Bogus presentation
- Dumbed down

VERDICT: A solid racing experience ruined by being far too 'extreme' for its own good.

7

IN REVIEW

King of Fighters XII



KING OF FIGHTERS XII

The king is dead



INFO

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: FIGHTING
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: AIE
DEVELOPER: SNK PLAYMORE
PLAYERS: 1-2
PRICE: \$89.95

The irony runneth over. SNK Playmore, purveyors of some of the scratchiest pieces of gaming vile, has returned to the halls of dead horse flagellation and pumped out a crinkled buggler of a fighting game they dare call king.

King of Fighters XII is nothing but a smouldering, pandering cheap trick unleashed to placate that strange – but thankfully shrinking – race of arcade rats too gutless to play anything new. Compared to ancient titles like *Street Fighter III* it's painfully second rate. Compared to new throne hogs, like *Street Fighter IV*, it's garish roadkill.

For those not in the know *King of Fighters* is a plastic imitation of *Street Fighter* that features a similar but infinitely less satisfying brand of kung-pow chicken.

This time *King of Fighters XII* pretends it's doing something different by featuring 3-on-3 matches. Unfortunately, like everything else it tries to do, this is performed with the same panache one might associate with a dropped pie. While players select a team of three fighters there's no mid-battle swapping or crazy link-up moves. When one geezer bites it, the game pauses while it loads up the next grommet. It's not as if it should be comparing itself to *Marvel vs Capcom 2* which mastered mid-round character swapping a decade ago.

Even so, that's where the risks end for SNK. Unlike Capcom – or even Midway – it hasn't tried to do anything else adulterous to the brand like rebuild it for the current generation of hardware. Nope, after rogering their 3D iteration with a pogo stick some years ago, SNK Playmore have returned to their dire fortress of two dimensional solitude. The result is on-screen dandruff. A new 2D fighting game should look like Snow White in a sauna. Instead *King of Fighters XII* gives us the seven dwarves chewing each other's bunions. Not only are the character models pixelated, but their overall design is flavourless.

King of Fighters is perhaps the laziest series in videogame history. It begs the question: what are the developers doing all day? For years we've sat back and cited the old adage "fans will no doubt love it..." We're not prepared to do that anymore. Admirers of this trollop need to grab a monkey wrench and lever their hands off this decrepit carcass. This isn't the king of fighters by any throw of the sceptre – just a joker telling the same flat jokes in a cul-de-sac with old, cold floors.

James Ellis



FINAL SAY:

- Some fun background animations
- Forget innovation, this isn't even modern
- Brainless AI and horror visuals
- Lacking depth

VERDICT: Grey, old, and well beyond retirement, *KOF XII* is irredeemable.

3



WORSE THAN **BETTER THAN**
FINAL FANTASY | WATCHING GRASS GROW



"This way, to a better game!"

CROSS EDGE

The most inessential fighting game cross-over of the year!

The absolute bare minimum of effort went into this production. NIS didn't phone this one in – it mailed it in. Every benchmark of excellence has been missed. The play experience is a lingering, sinking feeling, akin to that terrible moment when a teen-aged card collector realises that it is not gold he has hoarded, but worthless cardboard. Only two factors save it from complete functional oblivion. For one thing, it is not physically broken; we detected no game crashing bugs. You can gorge on the flavourless krill of the *Cross Edge* experience without worrying about it bricking your system.

The other is the fan-fiction-grade dialogue – there's lots of it. If you aspire to read flaccid tales of arbitrary video-game character cross-overs, but are too lazy to log on to the internet (or to write them yourself), then *Cross Edge* has got you covered. And this is indeed a completely arbitrary tale. We learn that these characters have been plucked at random from their respective game worlds, and left stranded in a limbo they openly refer to as hell.

And judging by the sparse (crudely rendered) foliage, rolling greens, and occasional sand traps, hell is a golf course. A golf course where synth electric guitar music is piped in 24/7, and every 30 seconds or so spent on the world map triggers a random encounter with wandering monsters. These too defy reason and rhyme. We can see why you might be attacked by a pack of wolves, or a giant (crudely polygonal) bee, but why would wolves and bees join forces against you? Wouldn't they be fighting amongst themselves? Ecological consistency was clearly not a priority for the design staff.

Combat is turn-based, and demands little of the player. A timer with around five seconds on the clock counts down between actions – plenty of time to swap to another character and press **Ⓢ** again to chain together a combo. Characters are represented on the game grid by crude little bitmaps, and in cut scenes by static reaction shots.

These are DS-grade graphics, but that's not the worst part. The overall graphic design is more than a little off, with cyberpunk allusions that only serve to cheapen the experience even further.

Yes, we get the purpose of the game: a structured means of wasting time for shut-ins and emotional cripples. The combat and exploration fulfill the same role as the plot in a porno.

Yet whereas the *Final Fantasy* games (and all their ilk) at least have the fig leaf of respectability that decent production values afford, *Cross Edge* is exposed to the elements – the dangly parts of the narrative shrinking under chilled indifference. Even the odd bit of saucy dialogue from Morrigan can't raise an eyebrow; the voice actress sounds like she's only in this for the money. Yes, there's full speech. But the overall low quality harkens back to the days when speech was new, and developers flogged all kinds of shovelware to a public giddy on novelty gas. Avoid.

James Cottee



FINAL SAY:

- Some mildly smutty dialogue
- Tawdry graphics
- Clunky interface
- Shallow combat
- Endless, pointless grinding

FIVE FOR FIVE

Cross Edge includes characters you don't care about from five different Japanese developers: Nippon Ichi Software, Capcom, Namco Bandai, Gust, and Idea Factory. Even if you like Etna, you're probably better off just playing through *Disgaea* again...

VERDICT: A misguided farce. Offensive.

3



INFO

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: RPG
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: AFA
DEVELOPER: NIS
PLAYERS: 1
PRICE: \$99.95

SOUL CALIBUR: BROKEN DESTINY

When two fighters meet and spout wrenching clichés

We're happy that Soulcalibur fighters settle grudges with their weaponry and not their mouths, else bouts would end in a cringe rather than a well fought victory. Skip the voice-over guy and intros, and you'll find this PSP translation is just as spectacular as its bigger brother and, dare we say it, more playable than the PSP's *Tekken: Dark Resurrection*.

Graphics and sound are lush; everything from the animation, character detail and slick framerate to clang of metal on metal, overwrought ring announcer and yelps from the fighters all contribute to making this a perfect pocket fighter. The shorter combos in SC allow your right thumb to do most of the work rather than altering your grip on the console to compensate for the four-limb control scheme.

Broken Destiny is packed with content, and is balanced for either a short spurt or intense session. While there's no 'Arcade mode', it's essentially been renamed 'Trials', available in three different difficulty settings, while Quick Match is a dip-in, dip-out best-of-five, and allows you to choose your next foe on the roster. The Gauntlet is a kind of story mode but acts as a guided tutorial and explains *Broken Destiny*'s rules and mechanics. There are even puzzle elements, as the rounds generally last only a few seconds and the condition for victory may not be to whittle your opponent's health to zero, but to withstand an attack and retaliate in a certain fashion. If your tactics aren't working, you might have to pick another character.

That shouldn't be hard, as there are plenty to choose from: 28 characters, all immediately selectable, including Kratos, and you're also able to create your own, either from scratch or riff on the pre-existing models. Though there's only one body type for each sex, the Creation mode is a time

sink. Pick a guy or girl, and you can stipulate every detail about the clothes and items they wear, as well as their facial features and voice. One caveat: while you can alter the colour and weapons of the other SC fighters, you can't alter Kratos, only equip him a few different blades. You can take a photo of this menacing, long-range fighter in a field of flowers. Gorgeous.

Joining Kratos on the roster is flamboyant newcomer Dampierre, a visual cross between a court jester and a circus master, but has two blades poking out near his wrists. Frantic and scary, he's perfect for short-range attacks.

Broken Destiny is a superbly polished game, and we only have one gripe: no online multiplayer, though ad-hoc is supported. Despite this it's a game of incredible longevity, and while *Soulcalibur IV* players may not find much new here, for everyone else this is fighting bliss, perfectly suited to the PSP. We can't rave about it enough. **Paul Taylor**

LAW OF THE BATTLEFIELD

Throughout your journey in The Gauntlet, there are a few occasions where the script diverges into ridiculousness as at the conclusion of each fight are a few sentences briefly explaining the next part of the story. After battering one sad sack, a fellow character chimes in with "You idiot! No one wants to hear the tragic back story of a side character! Losers are destined to disappear". There's a lesson to be learnt, kids.

PlayStation
Official Magazine - Australia
SILVER AWARD

PSP



INFO

FORMAT: PSP
GENRE: FIGHTING
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT
DEVELOPER: NAMCO BANDAI
PLAYERS: 1-2
PRICE: \$69.95

FINAL SAY:

- Tonnes to do
- Stunning graphics
- Creation mode
- No online multiplayer

VERDICT: It's amazing this has been crammed on one UMD with little sacrifice. Essential.

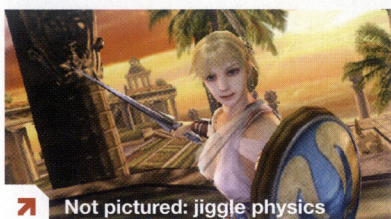
9



WORSE THAN
RIDDLE ME THIS...



BETTER THAN
TEKKEN: DR



Not pictured: jiggle physics



Angry, angry young man



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PlayStation
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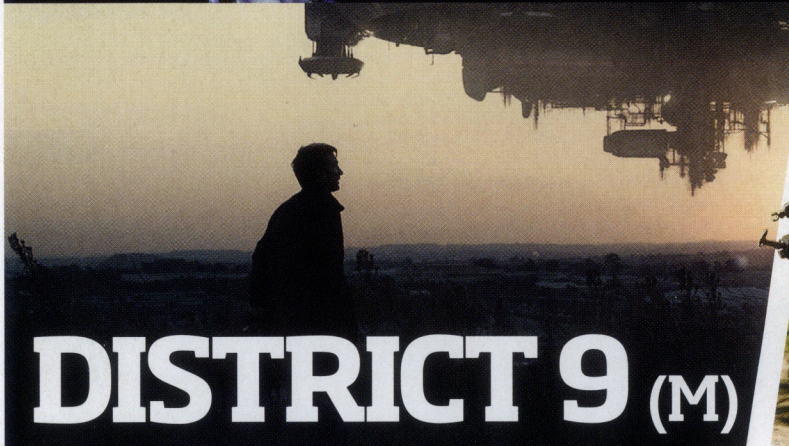
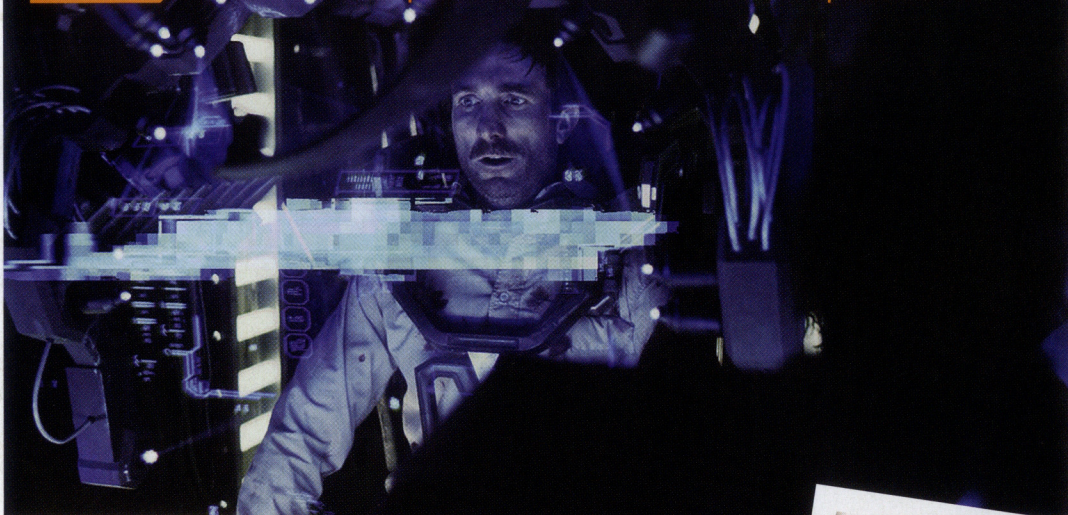


PLAYSTATION 3

INTERMISSION

On the screen

CINEMAS DIRECTOR: NEILL BLÖMKAMP | CAST: JASON COPE, ROBERT HOBBS, SHARLTO COPLEY | IN CINEMAS: NOW



DISTRICT 9 (M)

Here are some words that describe Blomkamp's debut feature, *District 9*: visceral, cerebral, vicious, satirical, hilarious, disturbing, alarming, intimidating.

But above all, *District 9* is dazzlingly original; you've never seen a movie like it. It's one of the movies of the year, and could go very well down as an all time science fiction classic.

In Hollywood, aliens are always superior beings, primed to either drive humanity into subjugation and slavery, or watch benevolently over us from a safe distance, like little transcendent Bhuddas. *District 9*'s aliens do neither – arriving in an enormous, ponderous spaceship that hangs over Johannesburg,

they're malnourished, animalistic, and eventually rounded up and grouped into what is essentially an enormous concentration camp called District 9.

We won't reveal spoilers, but what follows is a strikingly intelligent movie that mixes in mock doco sequences with incredibly orchestrated set pieces, and an insane amount of alien gun-related violence. *District 9* casts some disturbing allusions upon humanity's past and present treatment of minorities and asks a variety of uncomfortable questions of its audience: it's not what you expect it to be – not by a long shot. It will surprise and dazzle you. Unforgettable.



ALSO IN CINEMAS...

The Soloist (M)

Director: Joe Wright
Cast: Robert Downey, Jr., Jamie Foxx, Catherine Keener

While looking for a new story, Steve Lopez (Downey), a reporter for the *LA Times*, stumbles on a mentally ill homeless man, Nathaniel Ayers (Foxx), a genius at playing the violin and cellist. What began as one column transforms into a series, and their relationship from reporter-subject into a friendship. Impressive performances from the entire cast make this a great movie to take someone you're trying to impress to show them you have some class. Recommended.

The Taking of Pelham 123 (TBA)

Director: Tony Scott
Cast: Denzel Washington, John Travolta, James Gandolfini

A remake of a movie that isn't a classic and wasn't screaming to be remade. Travolta plays the bad guy who hijacks a subway train and demands \$10m in exchange for a carriage full of hostages. Washington, as the guy who's on the other end of the line, steals the limelight thoroughly and convincingly while Travolta and his goatee never quite build up the menace required for a bad arse role. Despite the tension it's ultimately only a serviceable movie.

THE BUZZ What's really going on behind-the-scenes

Remakes are so hot, they're permanently set to boiling point. This month we've seen a remake of an old film (*Pelham*), a film based on a book (*The Soloist*) and a film that expands on its short-film roots (*District 9*). Expect more works based on other

source material.

Coming up is *The Stepfather*, a remake of an '80s film of the same name. The children's books *Alice in Wonderland*, *Where The Wild Things Are*, *The Fantastic Mr. Fox* and *Little Red Riding Hood*, while video-games

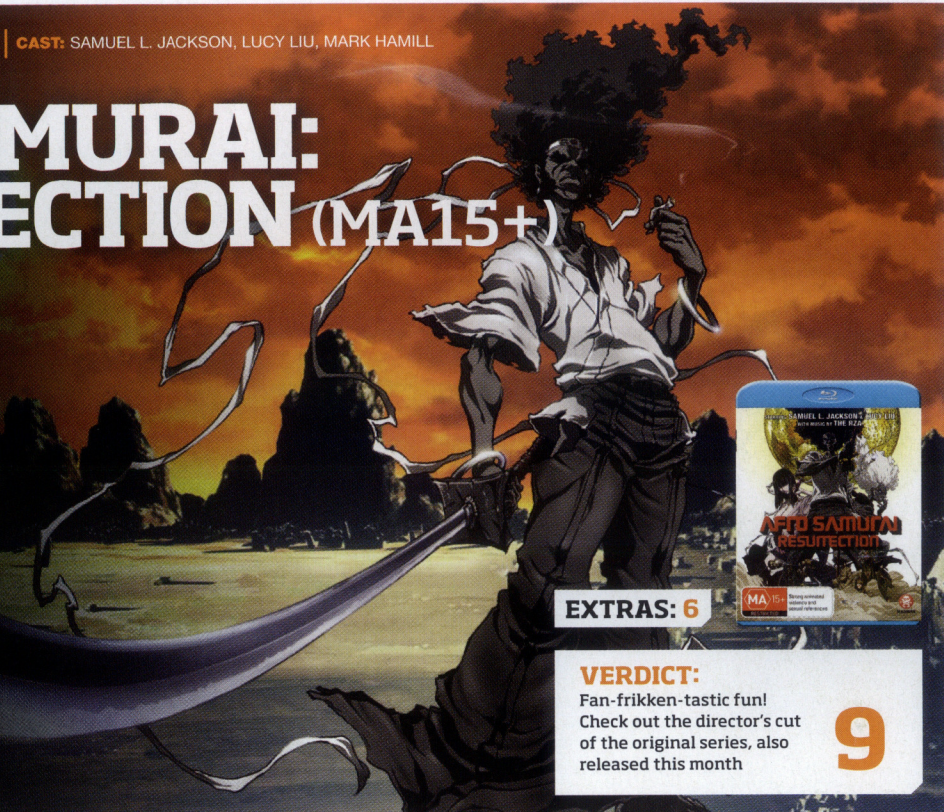
are back on the silver screen courtesy of *Prince Of Persia*. *Wild Things* looks like it'll be a visual treat. It'll have to be; the book it's inspired by only has 10 sentences, but remains as one the most revered illustrated pieces of literature of all time.



BLU-RAY DIRECTOR: FUMINORI KIZAKI | CAST: SAMUEL L. JACKSON, LUCY LIU, MARK HAMILL

AFRO SAMURAI: RESURRECTION (MA15+)

Following on directly from the brilliant hip-hop/anime hybrid mini-series known, surprisingly, as *Afro Samurai* comes the next chapter in this battle for the Number One headband, *Resurrection*. With rocking beats and score produced by the RZA (Wu-Tang Clan) and the main character, Afro, and his chatterbox weed puffing sidekick, Ninja Ninja both expertly voiced by Samuel Jackson, Afro cuts a menacing path when a presumed vanquished enemy hell bent on his destruction resurfaces with a sexy new partner, voiced seductively by Lucy Liu. Expect the usual insanity, from Afro's soft spoken and intense appearance, to the viciousness he uses to defeat anything in his path. Ninja Ninja's banter returns to add some much needed comic relief, coupled nicely with the overt sexuality offered by Lucy Liu and downright blood lust from Afro each time he draws his sword. Expect your favourite cuddly teddy bear for an encore performance, buckets of blood and so much cool, it can barely be contained.



EXTRAS: 6

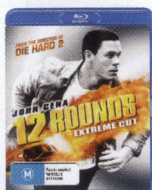
VERDICT:
Fan-frikken-tastic fun!
Check out the director's cut of the original series, also released this month

9

12 ROUNDS (M)

Director: Renny Harlin
Cast: John Cena, Aidan Gillen, Ashley Scott, Steve Harris

How the guy that brought us the awesomeness of *Die Hard 2*, *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and *Ford Fairlane* could direct this steaming pile of crap is beyond us. WWE wrestler John Cena is cop Danny Fisher, who ends up part of a deadly game of cat and mouse with an Irish adversary holding a personal grudge, running him through various action based and mental (apparently) hoops in a cruel series of games using his abducted girlfriend as bait. Even the drop dead gorgeous Ashley Scott did little to ease the pain. Honestly, we'd avoid at all costs unless you're a devoted Cena fan, or you're related to him.



EXTRAS: 5

VERDICT:
12 Rounds? It felt like a TKO in the first to us

4

STATE OF PLAY (M)

Director: Kevin MacDonald
Cast: Russell Crowe, Ben Affleck, Rachel McAdams, Jason Bateman, Helen Mirrin

A tale of murder and political cover-ups seen through the eyes of journalists is the hook for this political drama. After a young research assistant is found killed, investigating journo Cal McCaffrey (Crowe) sees all roads leading to up-and-coming congressman and friend Stephen Collins (Affleck), but all is not what it seems. With a powerhouse cast, an impressive return to form by Affleck and some scene stealing contributions by Helen Mirrin and Jason Bateman, this is a well rounded thriller. Though it doesn't get close to the brilliant BBC mini-series it's based on, it's entertaining none the less.



EXTRAS: 4

VERDICT:
An extremely watchable film let down by McAdams

7

SPLINTER (MA15+)

Director: Toby Wilkins
Cast: Charles Baker, Jill Wagner, Paul Costanzo, Shea Whigham

After the umpteenth *Saw* movie and *Hostel* and its ilk, many thought the arse had dropped out the bottom of the visually confronting torture porn slant on horror. Not so.

After a camping weekend goes wrong, two couples have their fates intertwined. With one couple carjacking the other, tensions are raised, but throw in a parasitic entity that has its sights on all of them, and it reaches fever pitch. The last stand at a gas station shows some ingenuity as both couples battle the beast on their trail and each other. Slightly predictable, but reasonable fun while it lasts.



EXTRAS: 6

VERDICT:
Proof that there's still life left in the horror genre

7



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Samurai Champloo
From the makers of *Cowboy Bebop*

DVD DIRECTOR: VARIOUS CAST: SETH MACFARLANE, ALEX BORSTEIN, SETH GREEN, MILA KUNIS

FAMILY GUY SEASON 8 (MA15+)



EXTRAS: 6

VERDICT: Though the randomness has been cranked up to 11, this is probably the most hard-hitting season yet **9**

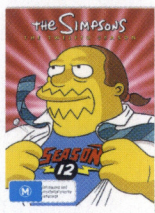
Seth MacFarlane knows a good thing when he's onto it, and he's milking this ride for all it's worth. Unabashedly and unashamedly in your face, this season doesn't hold back. The family's disinterest in Meg leads her to join a Christian cult after being seduced by Kirk Cameron, Stewie kidnaps the entire cast of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* for his warped Trekkie delight and gets more than he bargains for, as he does when he starts working out and gets hooked on 'roids. Lauren from *The Hills* makes an appearance, but isn't the rapid cannon fodder you'd expect, and these are just mere entrées. Parent station Fox doesn't escape MacFarlane's sights, and gets bent over and served for its typically biased news reporting, but the OJ Simpson storyline takes the cake. As usual they lead you down the garden path, and then yank the rug out from underneath you, but the OJ episode is so blatant, it's almost like a slap in the face!

THE SIMPSONS SEASON 12 (M)

Director: Various

Cast: Dan Castellaneta, Julie Kavner, Nancy Cartwright, Yeardley Smith

This was by far one of the blockbuster seasons for *The Simpsons*, where they really hit stride, week to week. Who could forget Homer splitting the town in two after the new phone dialing codes are announced, or how he debased himself as Burn's "prank monkey" for some loot and a taste of the better life? What about the father/son grifting moments or when Lisa fools the duo into thinking they had leprosy, to give them a dose of their on medicine? Or the intelligent Homer episode, once a crayon was removed from his brain? Classic.



EXTRAS: 8

VERDICT:

Watch this and remember how funny it used to be

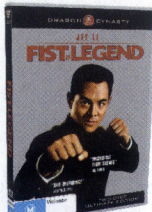
9

FIST OF LEGEND (M)

Director: Gordon Chan

Cast: Jet Li, Billy Chow

Western audiences may not be familiar with this title, and it pains us, as this is one of the best and most intelligent martial arts flicks out there. A remake of the Bruce Lee classic, *Fists of Fury*, sees Jet Li step into some rather large boots indeed. Focusing on elevated conflict between Chinese and Japanese dojos in 1937 Shanghai, it paints neither side as hero or villain and has a surprising amount of depth to the story. Yuen Woo Ping, the genius who orchestrated all the kung-fu antics in *The Matrix*, was behind the brilliant choreography and the near 20-minute finale between Jet Li and the behemoth of a Chinese General is one for the ages.



EXTRAS: 6

VERDICT:

Simply the best Jet Li movie there is

10

LESBIAN VAMPIRE KILLERS (MA15+)

Director: Phil Claydon

Cast: Mathew Horne, James Corden

We've all been there before, casually taking a break from the norm to go camping in the UK countryside, when you luckily end up sharing a cabin with some scantily clad party girls. After much fun is had by all, you notice something peculiar about your bunkmates. They seem to be vampires... lesbian vampires! What are the odds? Watching a couple of every day schmoes take it to the unholy undead is an absolute riot, with battle cries of "bollocks", "lets avittt" and one liners like "next he'll have me bummed by a big gay werewolf", it's hard not to chuckle through it.



EXTRAS: 5

VERDICT:

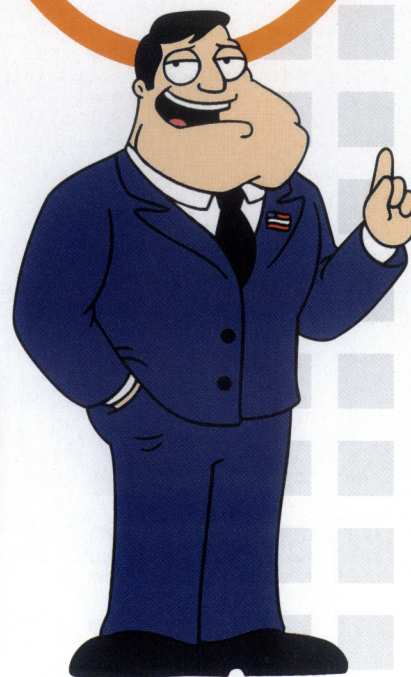
This could be *Shaun of the Dead 2*

8

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

American Dad

The wits behind *Family Guy* also make this laugh-fest



ESSENTIAL READING FOR BLU-RAY COLLECTORS



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ON SALE NOW!

INTERNET

PlayStation Network: Free to join, free to play!

LATEST

Download this...

Marvel Vs Capcom 2



This came in just a fraction too late for us to review this issue, but you need this game. Trust us. Beat 'em up fans? You've been called.

DC Universe Online trailer



Yes, it's massive for a video, but be amazed at the behind-the-scenes trailer of this hero vs villains MMO. Well worth seeing.

Gran Turismo trailer



The biggest and most authentic driving sim is on its way to PSP. Check out the GT-R and ZR1 in this short teaser.

Batman Arkham Asylum demo



What do you mean our review hasn't convinced you? Sheesh. Try a level as the Bat and see for yourself then. Do it!

Shatter



Yeah, a brick-breaking game doesn't sound exciting, but this is a major surprise. You'll love it. We do, anyway.

NEWS

BRAID

Set your expression to 'excited'. The universally acclaimed platformer *Braid* is making its way to PSN.

Starring a young bloke called Tim in a dapper suit, it's up to you to traverse the time-warping levels, collect missing pieces of paintings and get to the princess. The catch is that each stage



plays with time in a slightly different manner, and becomes a puzzle within a puzzle: you might have direct control over time in order to manipulate the environment or your movements alone might control the enemies in the stage – it's truly innovative and is guaranteed to bend your mind. Throw in lush graphics and clever references to classic platformers and you have an essential download. We've seen the Xbox 360 version, and love it. The only thing that'll make it better is when we can have on our PS3.

We don't have a release date or price at this stage, though you'll be the first to know more once we do.



ROCK BAND UPDATE

This is Spinal Tap!



We are amused and delighted that the rock band that wasn't, but was, is now in *Rock Band*. Full circle, yes?

Spinal Tap's *Tap Ten*, which is really 11 tracks, is now available to download on *Rock Band* and represents the group's first album from the 1984 mockumentary about England's loudest metal band. Honestly, if you haven't seen the film, do yourself a cultural favour and check it out, then enjoy the irony by playing the following:

- "(Funky) Sex Farm"
- "(Listen to the) Flower People (Reggae Stylee)"
- "America"
- "Big Bottom"
- "Cups and Cakes"
- "Gimme Some Money"
- "Heavy Duty"
- "Hell Hole"
- "Rock 'n' Roll Creation"
- "Stonehenge"
- "Tonight I'm Gonna Rock You Tonight"

Each song is \$2.45, or the whole pack is \$17.40



ONLINE REVIEWS

FAT PRINCESS

Baby got back... and front... and sides... and...

There is one type of gaming that is especially catered for by the PlayStation Network (PSN): the quickie game. *Fat Princess* – other than being the first game to deal with the growing problem of morbidly obese video game royalty – is the very epitome of the quickie game.

Primarily a multiplayer experience, the player drops into the game with 31 other folks and gets down to business.

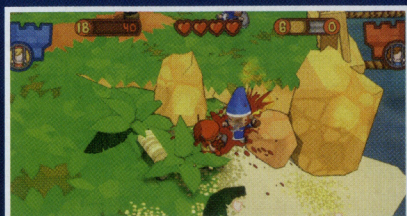
Graphically, *Fat Princess* looks like a children's book come to life. Lots of loud primary colours with cute, cel-shaded customisable characters running around platform-game style environments – it's cuter than a puppy-headed kitten.

However, upon closer inspection you'll notice the little blokes are actually savagely hacking, stabbing, exploding or draining the life out of each other. Blood and limbs litter the battlefield. This strange juxtaposition of cute and hardcore gore is delightful and that's just the start of the good times.

Just because *Fat Princess* is a quickie, doesn't mean it lacks depth. You see the wee fellows come in five classes (which you choose by donning various hats) – we have the Worker, the Mage, the Archer, the Priest and the Warrior.

All classes are vital, and a smart team will utilise them all. The Worker can cut down trees and mine metal which can be used to upgrade the classes, strengthen the castle's defences and even build catapults or bridges into the enemy's base.

At their respective peaks the Mage can shoot fire and ice, the Archer has a crossbow and a ye olde style gun, the Priest can either infuse other players with health via a squiggly



WHAT'S UP? CHICKEN BUTT!

As well as environmental kills, characters can pick up and detonate big bombs and throw strange potions that turn people into chickens. The good news? You can still kill folks as a chicken. A chicken of doom!



WORSE THAN KILLZONE 2 MULTIPLAYER **BETTER THAN** BC MULTIPLAYER



line of magic or drain the life out of enemies and the Warrior can use a sword and shield or big spear... thingy.

So an army of Warriors, backed by Archers and Mages with Priests jacking up the wounded's health while the Worker sneaks around destroying and building can be very effective.

The 'fat' in *Fat Princess* refers to the fact you feed the Princess cake. Lots of cake. That way she's harder to pick up and nick. Watching the waif-like Princess turn into a Hutt-sized beast lady is a hoot.

As well as capturing the Princess, there are team Deathmatch modes, castle occupation modes and so on, but really a gory game of capture the flag where the flag can talk and be made morbidly obese is hard to go past.

At time of writing there are 10 maps and a fairly limited single player mode, however word is more is on the way.

Fat Princess is a funky, weird little title that is utterly charming and very enjoyable. For under \$25 it's an absolute steal and a great way to kill time or just get your quickie gaming on. **Anthony O'Connor**



FINAL SAY:



- Cute carnage is absolutely delightful
- Surprising depth of character customisation



- More single player levels would have been nice
- The game depends on other players not being morons

VERDICT: *Fat Princess* has been on our radar for a while and it's good to see that it lives up to expectations.

8

PlayStation Network: Free to join, free to play!



ONLINE REVIEWS

CALL OF JUAREZ: BOUND IN BLOOD

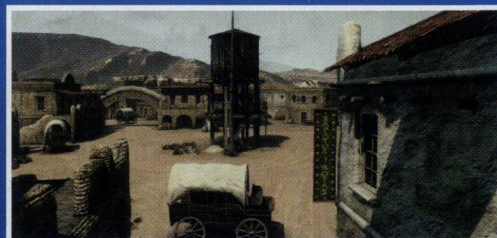
The Wild West puts its brand on multiplayer

INFO

GENRE: SHOOTER
DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT
DEVELOPER: TECHLAND
PLAYERS: 1-12
PRICE: \$109.95



WORSE THAN **BETTER THAN**
BATTLEFIELD 1943 CELL FACTOR



NO KISS KISS, NO BANG BANG

Taking a different path from the majority of semi-automatic shooters out there, *Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood* cuts its own with most weapons more of the 'slow on the draw' variety, leaving players vying for the top spot to duke it out on skill alone, rather than rate of fire. It takes some getting used to, but you'll find your game becomes a lot more deliberate and calculated, as opposed to the out and out fragfests that comprise most online shooters.



In an age of shooters where thousand upon thousands of shell casings litter the battlefield, air strikes decimate, mines, grenades and rocket launchers debilitate, it's a refreshing change of pace to engage in some well-executed and deliberate gunplay, smoothly cocking back the hammer and squeezing the trigger. It may not be as in your face, but it doesn't make it any less enjoyable or appealing now, does it?

Keeping with the dusty Western theme, all modes in *Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood* have a 'bounty' attached to kills instead of the usual XP to level up. Depending on the mode, you'll make a grab for big dollars and then either boost your character, or unlock one of the thirteen types available, each with upgradable weapons and capabilities. Some will send you to meet your maker, up close and personal, like the devastating double sawn-off sporting Hombre or the extremely powerful, yet weak bodied Duellist. Others prefer the silent but deadly approach, like the Spy armed with a Derringer and dynamite or the Native who'll run you through with a bow and arrow nice and quiet like. For those who walk the line, the Trapper, Gunsmith and Veteran all pack a neatly balanced punch.

'Wanted' is your basic free-for-all, with each kill gaining you cash, and 'Shootout' runs similarly, with an added bonus of putting a higher price on your head with each body dropped, so you become a bigger, tastier target with everyone wanting a piece of you. 'Manhunt' has one side running from the law, defending their boss, with the other bringing them to justice in a hail of gunfire. 'Posse' is straight up team deathmatch, but all pale in comparison to 'Wild West Legends', by far the most fun and highly replayable.

Divided into teams of sheriffs and outlaws,

you'll walk in the spurs of some of Western's greatest heroes and most grizzly villains as you work your way through group objectives, 'til the inevitable shootout finale. The high point had to be the Showdown at the OK Corral, where we happily lived out our Wyatt Earp fantasies (the Kurt Russel one, not the Costner travesty). At the end of each round, they flip the script with a "revenge" match, where the law plays the lawbreakers and vice versa for a chance to even the score and enact a little payback.

All in all, we had a hoot and a half strapping on our six-shooters online. It feels totally different to the modern day shooter, it really gives you a sense of the era, and it's quite exhilarating shooting to kill, with each bullet having to reach its mark or it's goodnight Gracie. You may have a touch of difficulty finding a match (with just over a half-a-dozen available max at any given time), but once you get in there, you're sure to enjoy the ride.

— Dave Kozicki

FINAL SAY:

- A hair trigger is essential
- Relive The Fight at the OK Corral
- No concentration mode
- Loudmouth yanks online

VERDICT: Some thoughtful modes and re-enacting classic Western shootouts was the way to go. Now draw, ya varmint!

7



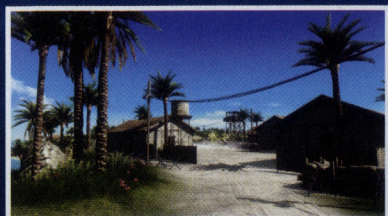
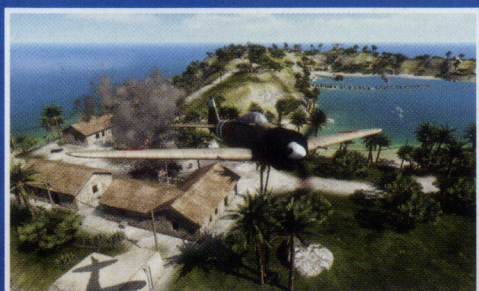
ONLINE REVIEWS

BATTLEFIELD 1943

Love is a battlefield

INFO

GENRE: SHOOTER
DISTRIBUTOR: EA
DEVELOPER: DICE
PLAYERS: 1-24
PRICE: \$19.95



VALUE FOR MONEY

BF1943 never gets old. We can say that with absolute certainty because day has turned to night and back to day again. For busy, important guys like us, this is high praise indeed. Oh, go on then, one more round...



WORSE THAN **BETTER THAN**
COD4: MODERN WARFARE | SOCOM



If you haven't heard about *Battlefield 1943* yet then it's time to crawl out of the wall space and turn your PS3 back on. Smashing first day and first week sales records it's comfortably the most downloaded game in PS3 history. So many people are playing it that it took a mere eight days for players to rack up the 43 million kills needed to unlock the Coral Sea Air Support mission. Talk about murder on the dance floor!

Except, of course, there is no dance floor. The action takes place on the beaches of Wake Island, Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima and the skies over Tulagi in the Solomon Islands.

Players are randomly allocated to the US Marine Corp (USMC), or Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN), although you can pre-arrange squads with friends, or set up private games if that's more your cup of tea. Each side has three classes to choose from – the Sniper, Rifleman and Infantryman. Pro tip: hooning around the maps as a Rifleman, blowing up unwary foes with rifle grenades is great fun. If that ever gets tired (it won't) you can always mix it up by stabbing snipers in the neck meat with your bayonet.

Game modes are limited to Conquest and Air Support. Conquest, if you're not familiar, is basically King of the Hill, with a number of strategic locations available for control. The more locations controlled, the quicker the victory. Boats, jeeps, tanks and fighter planes are dotted around the map to help change the tide of battle. Air Support is just that – a pitched air battle between the two forces, with no ground troops in the mix.

It's easy to see the limited maps and gameplay options as restricting, but it's actually anything but. With so few options to worry about, getting into a game takes moments. Once the game kicks off the action sucks you in so deep you forget about such piffling trifles as game modes and

concentrate on whupping ass.

For the most part it's seamless whupping too. The odd lag spike on Coral Sea was about the worst of it, and the frame rate is consistently smooth even in the thick of a hectic engagement.

When the action really heats up it's easy to get camped and it's not uncommon to be lumbered with a chain of spawn timers. Moving the spawn point to a carrier helps, but you lose a hefty chunk of time steaming back into the action.

That and the lack of maps are pretty much the only gripe, and they're minor ones at that. Seamless matchmaking and streamlined gameplay makes this an absolute joy to play, and we're sure that EA, masters of milking a franchise, will present some map packs soon enough.

Not only does *1943* breathe new life into a tired genre, it sets a new benchmark for the DLC to follow. Buy it. Buy it now!

Alan Moore

FINAL SAY:



- Vehicles add an extra layer of hectic action, and everything works precisely as it should
- One of the best minimaps we've seen



- Needs more maps
- Getting camped is never fun

VERDICT: Truly an astonishing achievement. Insanely good fun, and the price is right.

9

INTERNET

Gaming, trailers, downloads, friends...



ONLINE REVIEWS

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 4

With absolutely zero Rocky puns

In *Round 4*, you box. That's it; there are no novelties as a diversion and we're perfectly fine with that, because the modes on offer cater to casual and dedicated pugilists.

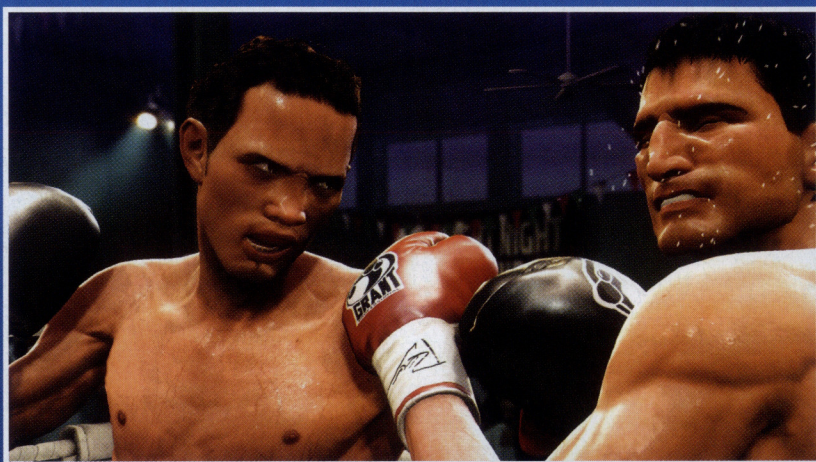
Casual players, those looking for a quick knock-about, will happily jump straight into Quick Match or Custom Match. Here you pick your weight division, any round limitations and your boxer and you're in. Ranked or unranked

matches are available, and you can choose to go against players of a similar ability, and even avoid people with a high DNF percentage. Those with flaky connections, however, will be at a disadvantage as DNF occurs whether you intentionally dropped out or not.

Where most of your time should be spent though is the World Championship.

Pick a created boxer and he'll be placed in to one of three weight-classes, and then goes against everyone else in the world to vie for the top spot. Smartly, your online-created player is completely separate from the offline doppelganger so don't worry if he bombs out in either mode. World Championship is like Legacy Mode in that you're engaged in a career, but you're battling against either much smarter or dumber players with real-world reactions; even now it's a tough slog to the top but the satisfaction here is immense.

The frustrations we have are purely technical. Sometimes it's impossible to get a match, whether creating or finding one, yet it was easy for us to connect to the World Championship. We tried later with no problems. Also, during rounds the game would stutter slightly, though definitely noticeable. We hope EA can patch these kinks out, as *Round 4* is champ potential. **Paul Taylor**



VERDICT: Like offline, this is deep and fascinating. Almost perfect, if not for connection issues.

8

WIPEOUT FURY

With great vengeance

It's easy to spout the numbers that make up *Fury*: eight new tracks, 80 events, 12 new ships, three new modes. 738MB in size. Like *HD*, a lot of the content is re-worked from the PSP titles, *Pure* and *Pulse*, but that shouldn't stop you. For less than the price of your favourite magazine, you essentially get double what *HD* provided. And it's more than a bunch of extras.

From the front-end menu system to the overhauled ship design, game-modes to expanded sound track, *Fury* is focused on aggression with striking, swirling red and black being the predominant theme. Each team's standard race ship has been significantly altered, surgically sharper in appearance and capabilities with more points added to two of the four characteristics, and allotted in a manner that will make you question your HD team's allegiance.

The two most significant additions are Eliminator and Detonator modes. The former is familiar to PSP players, where the



aim is to race on infinite laps and gain points by damaging and destroying opposition. Winning is defined by the amount of carnage you cause. The twist is that at any time during the event, **Q** will flip your ship around 180° so you can direct your barrage at the enemy on your tail.

Detonator is completely new, pitting you on a solo run with a low capacity machine gun against a mass of static targets that litter the track. As each lap progresses the velocity of your ship increases, like *Zone*, but any targets

you haven't cleared become obstacles to either dodge or clear. It's a technical event; expect to see monstrous high-scores on leaderboards soon.

Go download this now. **Paul Taylor**

VERDICT: Slick, expansive and a design fantasy. The extra modes mean you should prepare to fall in love again.

9



ONLINE REVIEWS

RED FACTION GUERRILLA: DEMONS OF THE BADLANDS

Get your arse to Mars, again, again

Do you love bullets, booze and babes? Us too. It's the holy trinity in our book, and like us, if you got to the end of *Red Faction Guerrilla* (relax, it's a spoiler free zone here), you were probably wondering what the deal was with that sexy scientific marvel, Samanya, and wished that you could get a peek behind the scenes to see what she was all about. Volition has its finger on the pulse, and is giving you exactly what you wanted in a Marauder-based prequel covering sibling rivalry, how Samanya joined Red Faction, and a whole lotta guns ablazin', hootin' and a hollerin' as you give the EDF a serve.

Welcome to Mariner Valley, the spiky, speary, skull-tastic home of the Marauders, around about the size of any sector you've previously visited. Apparently, there's no love lost between your peeps and the local EDF, with most of your populace imprisoned, including sister dearest. Without blowing the whole plot, most of the main missions involve prisoner liberation on a grand scale. You see, Volition figure you've already knocked out the game by the time you get here, so they've juiced up the DLC with harder, larger missions (the finale taking around an hour), sub-bosses, and have replaced salvage as currency and instead, given you an automatic upgrade of weaponry on any mission's completion. It works surprisingly well, and urges you to knock each "Marauder Action" (as opposed to Guerrilla

Action) out to maximise your access to things that go boom.

Of the Marauder Actions, there's a few Raids, a couple of Transporter ones to tackle, but aside from the story missions, the remainder are all about Destruction. As you'd expect, they're puzzling to say the least, but immensely satisfying once completed, like taking out two buildings separated by a ravine with nothing but a mech walker, or jumping an EDF vehicle armed with a remote charge to destroy a building across a chasm. Fan-freakin-tastic!

Weapons have been seriously juiced up too. The rifle is replaced with a rather nasty spike gun, your remote charges now reside in the hilt of the curved daggers you sport and embed themselves in anything; walls, vehicles, heads, whatever. But the big daddy of them all is the pseudo rocket launcher known as the Missile Pod. This bad boy demolishes everything like it's nobody's business, with a high rate of fire, loads of ammo and more grunt than a bearded Chuck Norris and Charlie Bronson love child.

With around five to eight hours of gameplay, depending on how anal you are about knocking out Pro times and collecting the 75 battery cores littered about Mariner Valley, this is killer value for money, with a explosive new arsenal and intriguing story, just icing on the cake. Get it now.

— Dave Kozicki

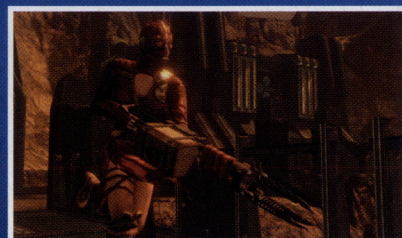
INFO

GENRE: ACTION
DISTRIBUTOR: THQ
DEVELOPER: VOLITION
PLAYERS: 1
PRICE: \$15.95



YOU CAN'T TOUCH THIS...

Carrying on the rough as guts feel to this section of DLC is a smashing piece of Marauder Action where you commandeer a giant mech walker with a twist. Those pansy-arse claws that passed for "hands" in the main storyline just ain't hard enough. In *Demons of the Badlands* you get a double dose of mace to meet and greet the EDF. You've got to create a distraction so the rest of your crew can liberate some imprisoned compadres, and what better way than to pummel 20 or so armoured vehicles with a mech?



FINAL SAY:



- Sassy, sexy and spunky lead character
- Upgrades ahoy!
- Outrageous new weapons



- B-grade vehicles

VERDICT: This is how it should be done. Exceptional new content that gives you a mess of new toys to play with.

9



WORSE THAN **BETTER THAN**
MAD MAX | TUSKEN RAIDERS

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO... MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM UNITE

It's the best-selling PSP game in the world. It's also the most challenging. Here are some tips for those entering the incredible world of *Monster Hunter* for the first time.

PREPARATION

Feel the burn

Monster Hunter is hard. Really hard. If you find that you're getting your arse handed to you, do not panic. This is normal. The whole game is a learning curve, stretching steeply upwards for 500+ hours. This suffering is worthwhile; for when you finally beat each new challenge, the satisfaction is magnificent. So, as Courage Wolf says, "Fall seven times. Stand up eight."

Try ALL the weapons

There are eleven classes of weapon. These are not rated by 'tiers' – all are viable against all monsters. The ones you end up using will come down to personal preference, so give them all a go – the ones you actually like may surprise you. For beginners, it's good to start with the hammer though.

Bring what you need

Preparation is paramount. If your mission takes you to the desert, take cool drinks. For the mountains, hot drinks. If you're hunting a monster that likes to jump between zones a lot (White Monoblos, we're looking at YOU), then Psychoserum is advised.

Shock traps and pitfall traps aren't just for tranquilising and capturing a severely wounded monster – the brief period they keep one pinned down can give you a vital window to lay in with some charged up attacks from a hammer or greatsword.

Flash bombs and sonic bombs can temporarily stun a wyvern, and in some cases knock them right out of the sky – this is another chance to plough into them. These tactics are not 'cheap'. Use what the game gives you. Do what it takes to win.

Going equipped

In addition to your supplies, you only get to

bring one weapon and one set of armour on any mission. Many weapons are imbued with elemental status attacks – fire weapons work great against ice monsters, for instance. If in doubt, just take the weapon with the highest RAW damage in your arsenal.

With armour, things really start to get tricky. You can wear up to five pieces: helmet, chestplate, waistcoat, gauntlets, and boots. Each piece will have its own bonus effects: Attack +3, perhaps, or Guard +2. Yet a skill only activates if you have a total of +10 across all the bits you're wearing.


Hence there is a definite incentive to wear matching sets. Your skill set can be further tweaked by adding gems into the sockets on each piece. There are dozens of skill gems available, granting poison immunity, higher chances of criticals, bonuses with certain ammunition classes... the range is staggering.

Most important of all: the skills attached to your equipment are the only 'skills' in the game. Your character doesn't have any, and never 'levels up'. So bring the right gear, or your battle will be over before it starts.

TACTICS

Keep moving

Even with high-end gear, a monster can kill you with just a few hits. Yet it can take more than half an hour for you to finish one off. So keep moving at all times – especially when they burrow underground. They usually re-surface at your last known position.

Tapping  to roll can be a life-saver, too – with a lot of charging monsters, it's possible to simply duck between their legs to escape.

Read their movements

At first, each monster will seem like an unpredictable juggernaut. Yet while their movements are random, their attack patterns

are pre-set, and predictable. What's more, there is always a 'tell' – a little twitch or movement that will hint at what it will do next.

When bubbles froth from the Daimyo Hermitaur's mouth, it means the giant enemy crab is enraged. Likewise when Khezu starts to gargle electricity, you can expect that blind, albino chicken to start moving at twice the speed. These movements also reveal weakness. When the Yian Kut-Ku's ears are folded back, it's severely wounded, and can thus be captured for extra bonus rewards.

The rare items you carve off dead monsters are used to craft your gear, so it's best to capture them whenever possible.


Sweep the leg

Each monster has weak points: the head of the Tigrex, or the base of the tail on the Monoblos. Many also have breakable parts that reduce their attack power. Smash the Blagonga's fangs with a fire weapon, and it can no longer stun you with its roar.

But when in doubt, sweep the leg. These beasts weigh tons, after all. Make one stagger to the ground, and you can get in some easy shots while it recovers.

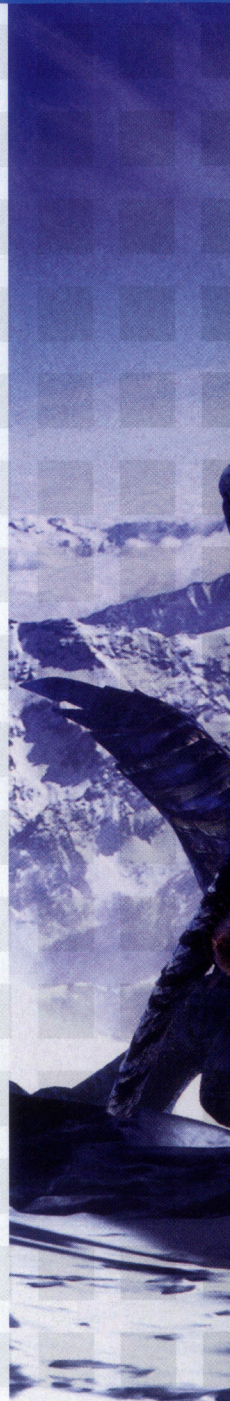
ALL ABOUT THE BENJAMINS

Love that shit

As weird as it sounds, much of the game revolves around poop. Attached to the hub zone is Pokke Farm, a place you can harvest resources between missions. Crops only really grow well when you fertilise them, and that means collecting dragon crap. So whenever you see some tell-tale giant cow pats, press  and scoop up all you can.

Abuse your pussy

Rather than using a BBQ spit in the field, it's far more efficient to pay the Felynes in





your kitchen to cook up stamina-restoring take-aways. Also be sure to eat a meal before each mission – the ingredients you choose will determine the temporary stat boost you get. For instance, Great Mutton + Meatwagon = extra Health.

Play with your piggy

The brief mini-game you can play with your pet pig boosts the loot reward for your next mission. We're not making this up, we promise. Seriously!

LEAVE THE HOUSE

While it's addictive enough in single-player, *Monster Hunter* really comes into its own when you go after a monster with your mates. And since Sony doesn't offer a service for PSP owners to play over the internet through their PS3s, that means one thing: if you want to try multiplayer, you'll have to meet other human beings in the flesh. You may even need to make new friends.

But rest assured: it's totally worth it. Happy hunting, people!

HOT TIPS!

Time for school, kids

In-depth tutorial modes are included for all game mechanics, and all weapons. Use them.

Take your single-player missions from the old lady by the campfire.

You can also take solo quests from the Guild Hall, but those are balanced for multiplayer. If you try them when you're starting out, you'll get hosed.

Combinations

Don't pay the rip-off prices at the vendors; combine your own gear. For example, Blue Mushroom + Herb = Potion, and Potion + Honey = Megapotion! Try every combo you can!

Mix and match

If you can't get the parts for a full armour set, then the 'Torso Inc' skill can fill in, like Choko in an apple pie.

Genprey Greaves have Torso Inc, as does the Giaprey Tasset.

Dig we must

Low on cash? Grow Power Seeds in Pokke Farm, and sell them. Too easy!

Swap meet

Those grumpy old orange-skinned men are the 'Vegge Elders', and they trade in super-rare items. Thunderbug Juice? Striped Skin? They've got it... for a price.

I can't hear you!

Dragon roars getting you down? Get a set of Hornet Armour – the High Grade Ear Plugs will make you immune to every roar in the game. Poison Hornetaurs to get the parts, and smash a Congalala's horn to get a Vibrant Pelt for the helmet.

Useful links

minegarde.com
monsterhunter.wikia.com
gamefaqs.com
www.youtube.com/user/naijiao

And remember:

Monster Hunter fans are incredibly passionate and courteous to a fault – and they love to give noobs a hand. If you can't find an exact answer, enquire on a forum. Ask, and ye shall receive!

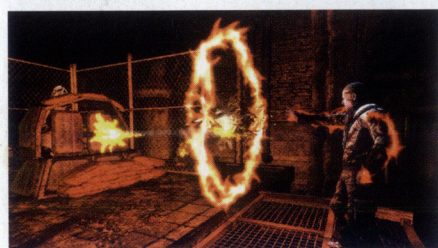
10 THINGS TO DO IN... INFAMOUS

Good? Evil? Whatever your flavour, *inFamous* has got you covered. As you're gallivanting around the streets, here's a list of 'shockingly' awesome things to do when you're not protecting the innocent, or pillaging the innocent. Either way.



1 BAD TO THE BONE

If you're walking the dark path and get a double dose of power from the race sphere, you'll get a maxed out energy bar and your electricity will take on a black look not dissimilar to Venom, of *Spider-Man* fame, and his wicked tentacles. Nothing like enhancing the evil!



2 SHIELDS UP, CAPTAIN?

When you unlock the Polarity Wall and its upgrade, you can convert bullets or projectiles to energy. Disdainfully walk up to a turret, let him recharge your powers, slip around back and end his sorry existence. We're still laughing like maniacs.



3 EXECUTION

This is a vicious bit of work right here. Use Arc Restraint on any downed enemy and keep them pinned to the ground. Then casually saunter up to them and let a few thousand volts rip their body for a 1XP evil bonus. Nasty!



4 BAD MEANING GOOD

When you finish the game, and are left to knock out any side missions, why not work in reverse? Playing as Infamous, run around healing people, or bio-leech and go on a rampage if you're a Hero. See if you can pull yourself back to neutral or even change your alignment.



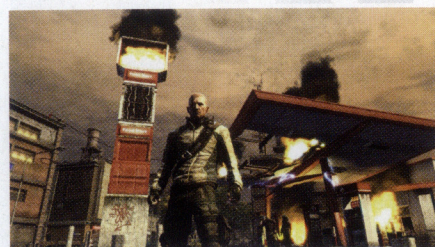
5 RUN WITH THE WRONG CROWD

Playing as Infamous, you'll get the opportunity to do some of the specific 'Evil' missions. A lot of these will have Reapers and Conduits as support as you assault Police and looks insane having Conduits port in and out, watching your back.



6 GIGAWATT BLADES

If you picked up the Special Edition, you'd have got a code for chock full of awesome Gigawatt Blades. These puppies give you a one-hit melee kill, look the shit, and pop out like a pair of electric Wolverine claws... snikttt!



7 FILL HER UP?

Several missions and frays erupt surprisingly close to the petrol station. Here's a fun fact... electricity + gazillion gallons of gasoline = bad guys ala flambé, explosions by Michael Bay. It respawns as well, so you can do it over, and over and over...



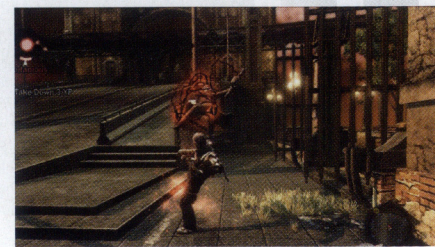
8 HAVE YOU MET MY FRIEND THUNDER?

Lightning Storm has to be the most God-like power there is, but why use it where appropriate? Why not take on a train mission and clear the tracks with some high voltage? You can easily recharge on the carriage.



9 EXCESSIVE FORCE

Once you're fully Infamous or Hero, go balls out on a mission letting loose Karmic Overload giving you unlimited energy for a brief spell. Lightning Storm works a treat, or as Infamous toss grenades and watch the clustering that follows annihilate all.



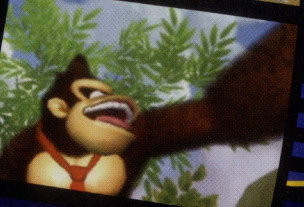
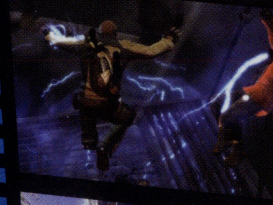
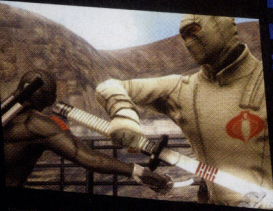
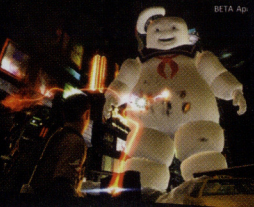
10 ALEX MERCER?

Try this on for size – using only melee, see how long you can last. Using dodging and Polarity Wall, you'd be surprised how well you fare, and don't forget about Gigawatt Blades too. Bring a little Prototype to *inFamous*.

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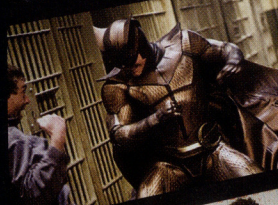
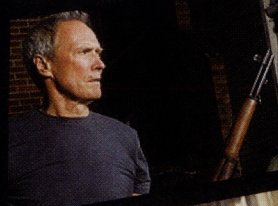
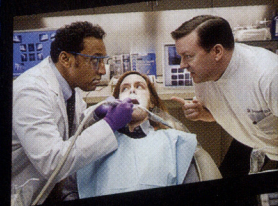
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INDEX

All the games that matter on PS3!

WANTED

My precious...



CRYSIS 2

Renowned for testing the mettle of any PC that its original incarnation ran on, this sequel to the popular FPS, which saw all hell break loose about 11 years from now when

North Korea invaded a fictional island (attracting the Yanks and some aliens, eventually) uses a new engine that we're hoping pushes the PS3 well hard.



JUST CAUSE 2

Also promising an updated engine (which you'd expect as the last one was on PS2) and a fictional Asian island, this sequel will feature an even more

expansive sandbox for us to play in. We've been teased with new weapons, new moves and beefed-up AI that will see smarter baddies for us to kill.



MAX PAYNE 3

It's starting to smell like Hollywood in here with all these sequels, not to mention release delays, as this, like the two

titles above, has now been shunted to sometime in 2010. The first in the Payne series not written by its creator, Sam Lake, we're promised an older, more jaded and effed-up Max who's hit the skids.



THE AGENCY

In the pipeline so long that we had to pump some Laxettes down there to try freeing up some new info, this MMO is still in the works, now promising a 2010 release. Doing the de rigueur

FPS thang, the player declares allegiance to one of two agencies before getting down to shooting, driving and spying.



THIS IS VEGAS

Saved by Warner in its buyout of Midway, we have a soft spot for this one as any game that demands that we party hard is okay by us. The idea is that some business

bloke is turning Vegas into a family-friendly happy land, so it's the player's duty to drink, gamble, race cars and otherwise wheel and deal to restore the once adult paradise.



TORNADO OUTBREAK

From early tease ads some were speculating that this would be the latest from Metal Gear Solid creator Hideo Kojima, but they were wrong, mister.

If you can imagine a cross between the Katamari series and Flower, then you'll be on the right wavelength. Just replace the ball of crap with a twister.

SIMPLY THE BEST...

The best of the best of the best of the best

ADVENTURE



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

"GTAIV is a game 10 out of 10 was designed for – a game that takes your rising, constantly spiralling expectations and vapourises them with a product so sublime you'll tell your grandkids about it."

DEVELOPER: Rockstar North PUBLISHER: Rockstar PLAYERS: 1-16

10



LITTLE BIGPLANET

"By rejigging the traditional platformer with physics and an accessible level creator, LittleBigPlanet becomes something delightfully simple and postmodern – a game that everyone can play, and endlessly recreate."

DEVELOPER: Media Molecule PUBLISHER: Sony PLAYERS: 1-4

10



RED FACTION GUERRILLA

"Turning destruction in to an art form, Red Faction Guerrilla is a sandbox experience of the the highest calibre. A credible physics package creates loads of 'must see' moments, making this a game you didn't even know you wanted."

DEVELOPER: Volition PUBLISHER: THQ PLAYERS: 1-16

9



MGS4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

"An incredibly layered gaming experience that is almost inexhaustible. One of the best games available on the PlayStation 3, and definitely one of the top exclusives. Buy and play this videogame now."

DEVELOPER: Kojima Productions PUBLISHER: Atari PLAYERS: 1-16

10



UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE

"The only bad thing about it is it ends, but hot damn it takes you on a transcendently enjoyable ride. There's no reason why you shouldn't buy this game."

DEVELOPER: Naughty Dog PUBLISHER: Sony PLAYERS: 1

10



DEAD SPACE

"The best survival horror title this generation – by an absolute country mile. Dead Space combines a smart story with incredible visuals, sound design to create what is arguably the scariest video game ever made. A must-play on every possible level."

DEVELOPER: Visceral Games PUBLISHER: EA PLAYERS: 1

9



INFAMOUS

"The city you explore, the game mechanics, the story, presentation, music and interface all conspire to play silly buggers with your perceptions of what video gaming is all about. Good for at least two playthroughs, the choice to use your superpowers for good or evil is, literally, in your hands."

DEVELOPER: Sucker Punch PUBLISHER: Sony PLAYERS: 1

9



FALLOUT 3

"Taking the solid base of Oblivion and placing into a post apocalyptic wasteland always sounded like a great idea – and Fallout 3 proves that concept brilliantly. This is a game that will astound you with the sheer depth and enormity of it's incredible vision."

DEVELOPER: Bethesda PUBLISHER: Atari PLAYERS: 1

9

SHOOTER



THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

"Worth your sweat. The combination of two campaigns equals a respectable 20+ hours of gameplay. A must for those wanting something moody and fresh."

DEVELOPER: Starbreeze Studios PUBLISHER: Atari PLAYERS: 1-12

8



KILLZONE 2

"Visually *Killzone 2* runs through the competition like a bull in the

proverbial china shop. Lucky then, that the game's design and story matches the lofty production values. *Killzone 2* is the first-person shooter evolved."

DEVELOPER: Guerrilla
PUBLISHER: Sony
PLAYERS: 1-16

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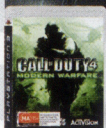


BIOSHOCK

"As a sub-par port, minus the promised extra content, *BioShock* is a disappointment. BUT you'd be silly to miss out on what is undoubtedly one of the landmark games of this generation so far. In many ways, this is a must play."

DEVELOPER: 2K Marin
PUBLISHER: 2K
PLAYERS: 1

8



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

"A fantastic shooter with a dizzying array of combat scenarios and packed with bleeding-edge military hardware. *COD4* is one of the tightest shooters we've ever played."

DEVELOPER: Infinity Ward PUBLISHER: Activision PLAYERS: 1-16

10



WARHAWK

"Tighter than a bull's arse on fight night and smoother than a glass of Guinness, *Warhawk* is a seriously superior piece of software. Multiplayer only, but you'd be barking mad to miss it."

DEVELOPER: Incognito
PUBLISHER: Sony
PLAYERS: 1-32

9



THE ORANGE BOX

"*The Orange Box* is ripe, in season, and packed with vitamin value. With five quality titles, including the sublime *Portal*, there truly is something here for everybody. An unmissable package."

DEVELOPER: Valve
PUBLISHER: EA
PLAYERS: 1-16

9



CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

"Superior in many ways to even *Modern Warfare*, this is a surprisingly superlative piece of software. Powerful, well-produced, stuffed with violence – it's fantastic. The action is relentless, the visuals buttery-smooth, the intensity savage – we love it."

DEVELOPER: Treyarch
PUBLISHER: Activision
PLAYERS: 1-16

10



GHOST-BUSTERS

"Well-honed and accessible controls, some spectacular visual effects, excellent pace, great level design, incredible attention to detail – all of these essential traits combined with the *Ghostbusters* universe and come together for a thoroughly addictive experience."

DEVELOPER: Terminal Reality
PUBLISHER: Sony
PLAYERS: 1-4

9



FAR CRY 2

"At times overstretching itself, *Far Cry 2*'s breath-taking ambition can often be its undoing, but it's still one of the best shooters out there. Plus, setting stuff on fire is still a ridiculous amount of fun."

DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PLAYERS: 1-16

8

TOP 5

FORTHCOMING PSN



ALIEN BREED EVOLUTION

Before Team17 had *Worms*, it gave us *Alien Breed*, quite the homage to SEGA's ace *Alien Syndrome*, or *Gauntlet* with slimy things. Cue Unreal Engine noughties makeover...



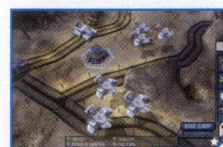
BRAID

Likely the most critically-acclaimed downloadable ever on that other machine, we'll soon be able to see what the fuss is all about with this time-bending platformer-meets-puzzler.



CASTLE CRASHERS

Another journeyman downloadable, this side-scroller with a bit of RPGness chucked in has won more awards than *Titanic* and has a totally kick-arse four player co-op mode.



MILITARY MADNESS: NECTARIS

Some may recall this turn-based sci-fi strategy blast set on the moon from the PSX days. It's now being given a 3D spit and polish for military strategists to get all gooey over.



RETRO/GRADE

Innovation is rare nowadays, so we reckon this sideways scroller that you play in reverse like a rhythm game, to save the space time continuum, deserves some kudos for originality.

INDEX

All the games that matter on PS3!

MAGIC MOMENTS



GAME: Cel Damage Overdrive
CONSOLE: PS2
YEAR: 2003

THE MOMENT:

Budget games are crap, right? It's been the dictum of gamers since, like, forever.

The thing is that many a decent game has emanated from budget labels. *Cel Damage Overdrive* is no exception, a product of System 3's cheapie label, Play It.

That *CDO* is, for all intents and purposes, old cartoon fave *Wacky Races* redesigned just enough to avoid the application of suing to arses was reason enough for us to pick this up initially, though we weren't super-enthused about the single-player mode.

So, we tried multiplayer, and BAM, things were happening – stupid things, but non-crappy things nonetheless. Clonking a mate with a great pair of boxing gloves had a certain evil charm to it, as did ripping forth massive razor-sharp blades and thwacking foes fair across various landscapes with a freaking huge baseball bat.

However, the best was yet to come in a level reasonably innocuously, in the context of things, entitled 'Death Valley'. Looking a little like Roadrunner and Coyote territory upon first glance, it became more and more like it after a bit of a trundle around. Being slurped up by a massive cartoon tornado had us pining for our Warner Bros. cartoon DVD collections – and smiling more. Hurling over a bridge only to have a trapdoor open and have us pausing in midair before sending us plummeting to our doom had us doing that much-touted 'LOL' thing, especially when we saw the little flump of dust and heard that "PAFI!" sound as we bit the dirt.

Yet the best was saved for later level, 'Mesa Madness'. Plunging over the edge for the first time we expected that annoying, yet strangely satisfying, "PAFI!" once again. But no, the biggest cacks of all were saved for our vehicle of choice hitting barely visible powerlines many metres below which emitted a twangy "BOING!" sound, soon followed by the sight of our trusty *OPSmobile* springing back for more.



RACING



PURE

"Pure shot straight from nowhere to rub *MotorStorm*'s face in its glorious graphics and watertight gameplay. It's not as varied as its main competitor, but damn does it play well."

DEVELOPER: Black Rock **PUBLISHER:** Funtastic **PLAYERS:** 1-16

9

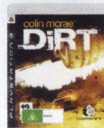


GRAN TURISMO 5: PROLOGUE

"An anemic game package that somehow survives by being what is quite possibly the greatest example of audio-visual excellence on the PlayStation 3 thus far. Well worth checking out."

DEVELOPER: Polyphony Digital
PUBLISHER: Sony
PLAYERS: 1-16

8



COLIN MCRÆ: DIRT

"The great man rests in peace, but his legacy lives on with this stellar racer that brilliantly bridges the seemingly impenetrable gap between arcade and sim. A seamlessly presented title that juggles depth and accessibility with a precise gusto."

DEVELOPER: Codemasters
PUBLISHER: Atari
PLAYERS: 1-16

9



SEGA RALLY

"To appreciate *Sega Rally* you'll have to continually remind yourself that it's a deceptively life-like caricature of a hardcore rallying experience. Not brain surgery, but it delivers the fun in big muddy spades."

DEVELOPER: Sega Driving Studio
PUBLISHER: Sega
PLAYERS: 1-6

9



RACE DRIVER GRID

"This bastard rock n' roll son of V8 Supercars and *Colin McRae: DiRT* is hot. Your lower jaw will relax. Your eyelids will take five. And you'll start to drool. Shame it ditched its sim roots, but the missing in action V8 DLC has us all a quiver."

DEVELOPER: Codemasters
PUBLISHER: Atari
PLAYERS: 1-12

9



FERRARI CHALLENGE

"*Ferrari Challenge* will surprise you by being that little bit better than you thought it could ever be. A hardcore racing sim that thrives on the details, this is a suitable title to fend off the petrol heads until *Gran Turismo 5* arrives to rewrite the racing handbook."

DEVELOPER: System 3
PUBLISHER: Red Ant
PLAYERS: 1-16

8



MOTORSTORM

"In our humble opinion *MotorStorm* was the best launch title on the fledgling PS3 – and arguably it's one of the greatest launch titles of all time. Defining next-gen racing as a platform upon which smart AI and terrain deformation could thrive, *MotorStorm* reinvented the arcade racer."

DEVELOPER: Evolution Studios
PUBLISHER: Sony
PLAYERS: 1-16

10



MIDNIGHT CLUB: LOS ANGELES

"Within its niche sub-genre, *MC: LA* reigns supreme. Well designed, rolling objectives, and an insane amount of customisation, *MC: LA* manages to rise above the rabble, easily beating off *Need for Speed Undercover* at its own game."

DEVELOPER: Rockstar San Diego
PUBLISHER: Rockstar
PLAYERS: 1-16

7



BURNOUT PARADISE

"You'll lament the thoughtless removal of splitscreen and the lack of a retry button, but you'll marvel at the slick frame rate, the sun drenched city, and Criterion's stellar commitment to free downloadable content. Awesome."

DEVELOPER: Criterion
PUBLISHER: EA
PLAYERS: 1-16

9

MUSIC & SPORTS



ROCK BAND

"A triumph. Harmonix has found the formula for a truly great music game – immaculate presentation, great tunes and a job for as many of your friends as possible. You wanted the best, you got the best."

DEVELOPER: Harmonix PUBLISHER: EA PLAYERS: 1-4

10



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 09

"Golf, for most of the populace, is about as exciting as watching paint dry in an old folk's home, so it's testament to EA that this game actually works well."

DEVELOPER: EA PUBLISHER: EA PLAYERS: 1-16

8

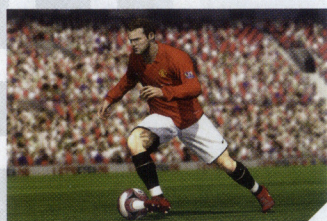


SKATE 2

"Despite some frame rate issues, *SKATE 2* is undoubtedly one of the greatest sports game's ever conceived. The controls are flawless, the city is dense, the balance is sublime. Massively addictive."

DEVELOPER: EA Black Box PUBLISHER: EA PLAYERS: 1-8

9



FIFA 09

"With it's new momentum physics, stellar visuals, and engaging gameplay, 2009 is finally the year that the *FIFA* franchise manages to leap the perennial hurdle that is *Pro Evolution Soccer*. Now Konami have to play catch up."

DEVELOPER: EA Canada PUBLISHER: EA PLAYERS: 1-20

9



STREET FIGHTER IV

"Capcom has been in the virtual brawling business longer than anyone, and with its vibrant look, online mode and pristine gameplay, *SFIV* is worth paying double for. Acquire on sight."

DEVELOPER: Capcom PUBLISHER: THQ PLAYERS: 1-2

10



NBA 2K9

"Basketball's hardly the national sport of Australia, but that doesn't mean that the game can't be fun. This is a decent representation of Barack Obama's favourite sport. Fans of basketball should check this out."

DEVELOPER: 2K DISTRIBUTOR: 2K PLAYERS: 1-10

7



GUITAR HERO METALLICA

"*Guitar Hero Metallica* improves upon *GHWT* in a number ways – a more user-friendly HUD, superior presentation and more attention to detail. Great tracklist too, including 'Tuesday's Gone' by Lynyrd Skynyrd."

DEVELOPER: Neversoft DISTRIBUTOR: Activision PLAYERS: 1-4

8

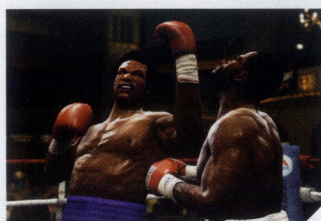


FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 4

"A spectacular game. Deeper and more technical, *Fight Night Round 4* recreates the sweet science more faithfully than ever before. Remarkable detail, incredible animation."

DEVELOPER: EA Canada PUBLISHER: EA PLAYERS: 1-2

9



TOP 5



PSN ARCADE BLASTS



1942: JOINT STRIKE

Capcom wisely harnessed the nostalgia of the WWII shooter, but significantly beefed-up everything with new strategies required for widescreen play. Our fave = multiplayer.



BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED

Absolutely THE best way to get some hotdog-armed action, Capcom took all the good stuff from the original and turned it up to 11 for the best arcade update, well, ever.



HEAVY WEAPON

Anybody who ever wast... erm, invested hours in the Amiga side-scrolling explosion-fest *Silkworm* will know the deal. PopCap has basically amped everything, and it rocks!



SHATTER

Breakout begat *Arkanoid*, and many years later the latter has 'inspired' *Shatter*, a brick-busting ball with weaponry and big bangs aplenty, even if it has a short shelflife.



SUPER STARDUST HD

You won't get much better blasty bang for your buck than this baby, one of the first PSN games and arguably still one of the best. It's *Asteroids* on steroids, with added Trophies!

INFAMOUS

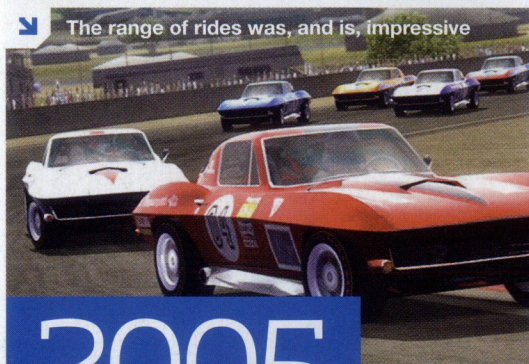
V8 Supercars 3



Real race rules meant penalties for bad conduct



A swag of real-world series featured: DTM (pictured), IndyCar and more



The range of rides was, and is, impressive



2005

V8 SUPERCARS 3

King of the mountain!

This is a game that knows how to impress by numbers. Up to 21 cars in a race, over 80 tracks, 60 frames per second. It's admirable that this was achieved on aging tech, and sobering that these stats haven't been repeated in this generation. We're struggling to think of a racing game that's available right now that's tapped into the same fervent psyche as the *V8 Supercars* series, and still this third iteration improved over its equally playable prequels.

On the grid at the same time as *GT4*, *V8 Supercars 3* still held its own as a serious sim, offering the options to extensively tinker with each car's setup. It was as accessible or as restrictive as the player deemed it to be.

Holding it back as the ultimate toy box was that a lot of the content was locked, only available after progressing through the single player Pro Career or World Tour modes. Implementing a strategy like this in 2009, where a good sample of the content in many racing games is available from the start, would prove frustrating. Yet, *V8 Supercars 3* played to its strengths. You just want to race V8s? Pick the

'V8 Quick Start' icon from the menu screen, and four button-presses later you're in, racing through 13 tracks. Either the brave, ignorant or those familiar with the previous titles jumped in without practicing, as the options to turn off the advanced handling and damage tamed the unruly V8s. Hitting Mount Panorama and becoming a pinball through The Esses was the result of a headstrong driver.

Still, it was a game that appealed to the hardcore and casual players, and it was obvious that practice was the best way to emulate the Bathurst stars. Known as *TOCA Racer Driver 3* in the UK, *DTM Race Driver 3* in Germany and *Pro Race Driver 3* in the US, it was the same game all over the world, albeit with localisations – and the content within made it a world game.

Codemasters, once the go-to studio for racing games, gave each type of vehicle an identity. From karts to Formula 3, buggies to truck racing, the characteristic of each is as solid as the variety available. It's a shame then that the future for the brand is currently in limbo. The Codemaster's follow-up, *Grid*, was rumoured to have a V8 DLC pack – with Bathurst as a new track – but none's forthcoming. Since the team's moved on the *DiRT 2*, we don't hold much hope for it to reappear. It's a testament to the strength of the game, then, that *V8 Supercars 3* is still as playable now as it was in 2005. **Paul Taylor**



GIVING YOU WHAT YOU WANT

According to the official *V8 Supercars* website, the series is the third most watched sport on TV in Australia, beaten only by cricket and AFL. *V8 Supercars 3*, like the previous two titles, delivered what the fans wanted: the chance to race Holdens and Fords at Bathurst, and across the whole season. If this was a current gen title, we imagine the opportunity for DLC – updated cars, new tracks in the racing season – combined with the sport's popularity would be huge.



INFO

CONSOLE: PS2
GENRE: RACING
DEVELOPER: CODEMASTERS
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: UK
CURRENT APPROXIMATE PRICE: \$14 (JB) \$29.95 (GAME)





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Disclaimer: OPS will do everything within its power to deliver this content next month, but we can't be held at fault if things go awry or scheduled games slip and miss our deadlines!

ATARI



GHOSTBUSTERS™

— THE VIDEO GAME —

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PG

Mild Themes



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